Cross/Cultures 99

Other Tongues

Rethinking the Language Debates in India

Edited by
Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare

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Readings in the Post / Colonial
Literatures in English

99

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OTHER TONGUES: *The Language Debates in Indian Literatures* is a project that began in 2005 as a pre-conference roundtable at the Annual South Asia Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. From roundtable to final manuscript, this has been an exciting journey, and we have had many companions on this trip who have helped us find our way, stay focussed on our destination, and offer respite when the journey got exhausting. We would like to thank these friends.

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Introduction

Problematizing Indian Literary Canons

BONNIE ZARE AND NALINI IYER

> Writing depends on readership. And if in those languages, shall we say Marathi or whatever, there was sufficiently large readership, the books if they were great enough, would have made an impression.[1]

> We have a very live tradition in the Indian languages of spoken word and the neoliterates who are brought up with that kind of literary unwritten texts which are narrated through memory […]. When you become a writer from a world like that, you may bring some of those narrative techniques. It is not merely […] the content […] but the aesthetics of it [that] may also be very important.[2]

> I am really shocked at some of the things that are being said about the English writers. When you talk about it you create two different divisions – writers in language and writers in English. That I write in English is very incidental […]. I am more for discarding identities than claiming any identity.[3]

OTHER TONGUES: *Rethinking the Language Debates in India* was inspired by a half-day pre-conference attached to the University of Wisconsin South Asia Studies conference in 2005. The pre-conference, organized by Dr Asha Sen and us, brought ten speakers and many participants together in response to the title "Is There

[1] V.S. Naipaul, "Inaugural Address," in *At Home in the World*, ed. K. Satchidanandan et al. (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2005): 11–12.

[2] U.R. Ananthamurthy, "A Way in the World: Writing and Belief," in *At Home in the World*, 17.

[3] Shashi Deshpande, "Ideas of India," in *At Home in the World*, 33.

Nowhere Else That We Can Meet? Overlap and Distinctiveness within the Emerging South Asian Literary Canon." The gathering was designed to interrogate essentialist claims about Indian writers by reading a cross-section of contemporary authors in different languages and locations against one other. We questioned the binary divisions of English/vernacular and diaspora/native that we saw many media accounts reinforcing. We wondered to what degree these divisions illustrated an internal logic and to what degree they were simply an emotional byproduct of a postcolonial and globally manipulated publishing world. Our project sought to map how questions of territory distract from the central issue of engaging a larger public in reading and understanding the emerging South Asian literary canon.[4]

The pre-conference generated a lively discussion and led to our belief that the time was right for a book on this topic. Indeed, the debate was recently scrutinized at a seminar coordinated by Suman Gupta and Tapan Basu at the Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies, Open University, United Kingdom in March 2007.[5] And questions of audience, language, canon, and translation continue to surround the coverage of every major literary conference in India and of every Indian writer who wins a Western award. For example, grievances that echo disagreements at the Neemrana celebration of literature in 2000 surfaced at the Jaipur litfest on 19 January 2006.[6]

This collection explores the implications of the energetic and, at times, acrimonious public debate among Indian authors and academics over the

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[4] We began our project with the intention of including discussions of work published in all of South Asia, rather than India alone. We feel strongly that literature from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka ought to receive greater attention and were disappointed at not being able to gather essays that represented the larger geographic region.

[5] For more information, see the Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies, the Open University (http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/indian-lit/index.html).

[6] As Sheela Reddy noted, "The feeling of being excluded persisted among writers. Included in the list of fourteen writers carefully hand-picked for the Literature Festival were three Rajasthani writers, including the hugely popular poet Sheen Kaif Nizam. Lodged in the same hotel wing as the Indian English stars, it was as if they were from another planet: their orbits never touched." Sheela Reddy, "Literary Schtick," *Outlook India* (21 January 2006): www.outlookindia.com. Attending bloggers had a mix of opinions. Compare, for instance, Jabberwock's coverage (at http://jaiarjun.blogspot.com/2006/01/last-notes-on-fest-hari-kunzru-shobhaa.html#comments) with Huree's (at http://www.ultrabrown.com/posts/category/literature/).

hegemonic role of Indian writing in English.[7] The debate, which spans continents and nations, centers on how English works are taken to define the cultural and aesthetic parameters of Indian literature in a global context. As World War II ended, and erstwhile European empires lay in fragments, the many nations that gained self-rule questioned the role of the English language in every aspect of daily life, including the field of literature. Francophone writers such as Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, who were intensely engaged with nationalist concerns, led the charge; since then, well-known statements by Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o about English as extending colonialist mental slavery continue to have a large impact on generations of writers.[8] The Asmara Declaration of 2000, a set of shared principles formed by a pan-African group of writers and scholars, asserts that the use, promotion, and development of research on African languages is essential to decolonizing African minds, and that ushering in an African renaissance depends upon capturing the rich heritage contained in African languages specifically.[9]

As in other postcolonial nations, during the 1960s the debate in India centered on the role of the English language in perpetuating and maintain-

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[7] This book limits itself to the discussion of Indian English literature in India and in the USA for the following reasons: 1. The editors work within US academia; 2. Indian English literature has become significant in US academic settings with the development of Postcolonial Studies and area studies. In the US, area studies emerged during the Cold War period and postcolonial studies developed after the civil rights movement with the debates over Western civilization courses in the 1980s. We leave the debate over Indian English literature in the UK or Canada to be the subject of another book that can explore the role of academics, writers, and the publishing market from those historical and national locations.

[8] See, for instance, Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972); Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre* (London: James Currey, 1993); Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975); Jane Wilkinson, *Talking with African Writers* (London: James Currey, 1992).

[9] While admiring this stance, it is difficult to know whether – in an age in which wealth, power and influence are controlled less by nation-states than by non-state corporate actors – the African languages can, in the words of the declaration, successfully be seen as "vital and equal" to any other language for empowering the African people. For the document, see *Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures into the 21st Century* (Asmara, Eritrea, 2000): www.outreach.psu.edu/C&I/AllOdds/declaration.html

ing the cultural and ideological aspects of imperialism. From that point on until today, the debate has continued in India, particularly in the English-language and Indian-language newspaper coverage. However, the argument has moved into other publications media in many parts of the world where there is a large Indian population, including the USA.

Some question the amount of ink that has already been spilt on the issue;[10] yet such debates, which have taken on renewed energy lately, are to be expected, for two reasons. First, dramatically increasing economic stakes are involved in book circulation. The attention paid to English-language writing[11] in international and metropolitan newspapers and literary reviews, in college classrooms, in multinational public companies, and in international prizes like the Man Booker prize means that English literature receives disproportionate financial and cultural attention compared with books in Indian languages that have very limited circulation beyond national borders. Such an emphasis on anglophone writing, it is alleged, ignores the innovations, creative energies, and excellence of *bhasha* (or vernacular/regional) writing in India.[12] The second reason for the persistence of these debates is that one byproduct of globalization is monotonization. In such a fast-changing and ever more routinized society (in which it appears that, world-wide, nearly every coffee shop will become a Starbucks and every restaurant a McDonalds), retaining a sove-

[10] For instance, Vikram Chandra feels that it is self-evident that a work can have local, global and even eternal elements simultaneously. Vikram Chandra, "The Cult of Authenticity: India's cultural commissars worship 'Indianness' instead of Art," *Boston Review* 25.1 (February–March 2000): www.bostonreview.net/BR25.1/chandra.html

[11] Beginning in the late 1970s, in the US academy, literature written outside of America and the UK was designated as 'Commonwealth literature', which was granted its own division of the Modern Language Association. Eventually the British and post-war specificity of this term was superseded by the term 'postcolonial', which matched a theoretical emphasis that helpfully illuminated and revived many more texts.

[12] We have chosen to refer to texts written in Indian languages other than English as *bhasha* (a word that means language in several Indian tongues) writing. Other terms in use are 'regional language', which could be taken to emphasize a limited, local audience, and 'vernacular', a word that may carry a derogatory implication because etymologically it refers to the language of slaves. While we prefer the term *bhasha*, at times we use 'vernacular' when we cite other writers who prefer that term. Similarly, some of our contributors have chosen to use 'vernacular', and we have left that in to indicate that this terminology is in flux.

reign or separate identity "whether religious or ethnic, as refuge or source of meaning becomes intense."[13]

This volume

– offers nuanced analysis of the language, audience and canon debate;
– provides a multivocal debate in which academics, writers and publishers are brought together in a multi-genre format (academic essay, interview, personal essay); and
– explores how translation mediates this debate and the complex choices that translation must entail.

Other Tongues is the first monograph to bring together voices from differing national, linguistic, and professional contexts to examine the more hidden nuances of this debate over language. It includes seven scholars who live and teach in the USA (four of whom study translation), three writers – two of whom live in India, and three publishers from India. By creating dialogue between different stakeholders, the volume brings underrepresented aspects of the Indian literary field and these discussions to light. To contextualize the chapters to follow, this introduction will discuss the complexity of Indian literary canon formation in the context of Indian letters, the ongoing debates about who is read by whom and for what purpose, and the current state and efficacy of translation as a means of bridging space between writers and audiences.

Confining canons

Literary canons in every language have always been formed by the power/knowledge nexus and have been shaped by various ideological structures. Naming just a handful of authors as stars in the literary firmament, to be taught to undergraduates and therefore made widely available in libraries and bookstores, carries power. Academics, editors of anthologies, publishers, and journalists carry inordinate power in the construction and dissemination of stories and their writers. The situation is inherently political. In the USA the politics of such selection was acknowledged only after movements for racial and gender equality and curricular inclusion helped highlight the biases forming the canon. Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and the Stanford University core Western Culture requirements and controversy over teaching these

[13] Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2003): 12.

mainly white European male authors that ensued in 1988 ushered in a wholesale debate about inclusion and terminology. This in turn led to what the media would sweepingly call "the culture wars," eventually also creating a backlash about whether egalitarian thought is aided by an atmosphere of new terminology, sometimes termed 'political correctness'. The achievements of many cultures are now more likely to be included in contemporary college English literature curricula. Yet, as many have noted, an all-purpose 'add diversity and stir' multiculturalism can easily be co-opted into the service of palliating the bourgeois mainstream white establishment to feel tolerant while continuing to marginalize others.[14] As Himani Bannerji declares, "We are not going shopping in the market of cultural differences […]. Our struggle is for a fundamental change in social relationships rather than for a per community quota of representations."[15]

In India, that an English literary canon still exists at all today is in itself somewhat controversial, for such a tradition stems from a colonial educational agenda imposed on India by British policy makers from 1854 onward when persons such as the Secretary of State for India were swayed by the representatives of the British government to establish a eurocentric curriculum. This curriculum, as Sabyasachi Bhattacharya points out, associated with Macaulay's famous and often-quoted "Minute on Indian Education of 1835," was taken up enthusiastically by many others such as Rammohun Roy and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar.[16] As Harish Trivedi has mapped out, with few exceptions, such as the case of Bengali, English literature was received by Indian readers in a similar pattern of exposure: from 1875 onwards, Shakespeare's plays were introduced and translated at high speed, as were classics of eighteenth-century literature. In the 1920s and 1930s, English Romantic poetry became all the rage in India.

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[14] See, for instance, *Feminism without Borders*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Durham NC: Duke UP, 2003), Arun Mukherjee, *Oppositional Aesthetics* (Toronto: TSAR, 1994), and Sanjay Sharma, *Multicultural Encounters* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006). Sharma states that developing an ethical multicultural pedagogy is a difficult, if not impossible task, but one that must be undertaken nonetheless to increase the possibility of encountering alterity.

[15] Himani Bannerji, "Returning the Gaze: An Introduction," in Bannerji, *Returning the Gaze* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1993): xxix.

[16] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "Crossroads in the History of Education," *Biblio* (September–October 2006): 31.

Thus "four hundred years of English literature from Shakespeare to T.S. Eliot were received and processed by us in about six decades" – the decades from 1880 to 1940.[17] Trivedi goes on to state that although writers around the time of Independence were moving on, taking more inspiration from Eastern European and Latin American authors, academics remained rooted in the tradition of English letters.

It is crucial to point out that students of the aforesaid letters are often urban and middle-class, and are pursuing English simply to gain greater facility with the language because of the obvious economic advantages of fluency in English, rather than out of any sense of literary appreciation. In 1993 Trivedi could state that the brightest of students who also had the most affluent parents were flocking to English departments and then joining the 'power elite'; today the power politics have shifted; urban middle-class students are filling business, advertising, journalism, and computer technology classrooms instead. Aside from the numerically small middle class, we should bear in mind that many of India's citizens are neither respected for their familiarity with vernacular languages nor provided with sufficient English education to fare easily in that medium either.[18]

In 1993, Harish Trivedi called on the Indian English academy to "decolonize ourselves, to begin to attain some semblance of literary and cultural autonomy."[19] He laid out as a blueprint an English literature curriculum based, in varying amounts, on *panchadhatu*, five equally well-respected elements of learning: literature in English from England, literature in English from elsewhere, literature in English translation, but then, newly, literature in a modern Indian language and literature in a classical language (Sanskrit or Greek) to "deepen our conception of literature" and gain a better understanding of literary allusions.[20]

Whether reform would come best in this way or not, it is hard to be hopeful about the pace of change. True, most major universities have revised the English curriculum over the past few years, but these changes offer little evidence that Indian-English writing is receiving substantial

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[17] Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993): 207.

[18] Amit Chaudhuri, "Introduction" to *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*, ed. Chaudhuri (London: Picador, 2001): xii.

[19] Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions*, 215.

[20] *Colonial Transactions*, 218.

support and acceptance. While the situation differs from state to state, with Kerala and Orissa embracing change more readily than other states, a glance at prestigious Delhi University's 50-college curriculum confirms that Indian scholars are resistant to reassessing and incorporating their own contemporary writers. During a 2006 stay in Delhi, Bonnie Zare discovered that for the B.A. English literature course at Delhi University, for instance, one paper out of nine is on "Twentieth-Century Indian Writing" and covers a novel each by Tagore and Amitav Ghosh, a play by Vijay Tendulkar, a handful of short stories (by such writers as Premchand, R.K. Narayan, and Saadat Hasan Manto), and a few poems (by, for example, Nissim Ezekiel and Jayanta Mahapatra). Two stories, "Lihaf" by Ismat Chugtai and "Squirrel" by Ambai, stand in for the wealth of literature written by Indian women. In the third year, within the Contemporary Literature paper, an essay by V.S. Naipaul and a story by Salman Rushdie indicate the possible presence of a body of work by non-resident authors of Indian origin.

On the other hand, in Chennai, Stella Maris College, a highly ranked autonomous college for women, requires twelve core courses for undergraduates, of which two are Indian Writing in English and one is Postcolonial Literature. South Asian Writing and Introduction to Translation Studies are optional. In their Postgraduate program, students are required to take ten core courses that include Modern Indian English Literature, Postcolonial Literature, and Indian Literature in Translation.[21] Clearly, as this informal survey reveals, the English curriculum varies across India but the emphasis on British Literature continues.

Regarding the non-English Indian literary canon, unless a student is majoring in Sanskrit, Bengali or Tamil in college, the average undergraduate has the option of studying an Indian language as a second language, and such study may include some literary works. However, because few readers actually read (as opposed to speak) more than one Indian language beyond functional fluency, most Indian students have a limited understanding of literary works in their own native language and in other Indian languages. Consider the dearth of resources for the most politically elevated of India's languages, Hindi. Hindi is required for pupils in the ICSE system solely until Class X and in CBSE solely up to Class VIII. At Delhi University, as at other state universities, student interest in Hindi

[21] See www.stella maris college.org/departments/English.asp

has produced a situation where the cutoffs for acceptance are in the non-competititve 40s and 50s. In a recent editorial piece, Vasudha Dalmia sounds alarm bells about the scarcity of opportunity for students of Hindi and other non-English Indian languages in the Indian academy, summarizing the situation as heralding the death of vernaculars:

> though the states have produced their own vernacular elites, there is a vast and yawning gap between them and metropolitan elites [...]. Bengali, Marathi, Tamil Hindi and other Indian languages were once at the vanguard of Indian literary modernity, the primes sites of resistance to colonial exploitation [...]. The vitality and creativity in these languages have not ceased but they are largely sealed to metropolitan elites, increasingly deprived of linguistic access to the very resources which nurtured the creativity of their parents' and grandparents' generation.[22]

Despite many intellectuals' concerns about its colonial and hegemonic nature, the spread of English clearly will continue to rise, especially in the context of the underfinanced and endangered study of Indian languages and literatures. Although only four percent of the population are fluent in English, since the business sector has basically been forced by global flows to use English, this number will only grow.

Despite ongoing controversy over educational mediums in various states, English has been universally acknowledged as India's link language, and the Indian population is so large that India forms the world's third-largest market for English-language books. Even before Independence, because of the boundaries preventing cross-regional communication, admired texts were made available in English translation for greater circulation. During the 1950s–70s, a greater cross-regional appreciation of the arts from various locales was promoted to facilitate the Nehruvian goal of embodying 'unity in diversity'. The newly independent Indian government allocated resources to developing its rich cultural heritage, creating the Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Literature) in 1954. It was funded to commission and publish translations of the most well regarded regional Indian literature into other Indian languages and into English. Since 1957 it has also published translations, mainly of short

[22] Vasudha Dalmia, "Death of Vernaculars," *Times of India* (13 November 2006): www.timesofindia.com

stories and poems, in its journal, *Indian Literature*. Every year it honors authors and translators in twenty-four languages with awards. Thus the Akademi has been an integral part of constructing a canonized list of resident Indian authors.

Many have written of the uneven quality of the translations, however, and the 1980s brought a welcome change when translation activity undertaken by Penguin India, Permanent Black, Seagull, and Kali for Women joined the work of older firms like Macmillan and Orient Longman. Since 2000, though, most presses are producing fewer translations. There is no question that readers long for more organizations along the lines of Katha Press that make consistent and notable contributions to high-quality translation. Particularly successful are Katha's annual prize volumes, which since 1991 have drawn attention to a year's worth of high-quality stories translated from regional languages. In December of 2006, the National Knowledge Commission, a think-tank that reports directly to the Prime Minister, after a year of consultations and meetings, put out a proposal recommending that Rs 250 crore be reserved to carry out the following action items:

— provide impetus for developing translation as an industry;
— establish a store-house of information;
— promote printed as well as virtual publication;
— create and maintain various tools for translation;
— provide quality training;
— project Indian languages and literatures within South Asia and outside;
— establish a National Translation Mission (NTM) to carry out these activities.

As of this writing, the proposal has been forwarded by the prime minister to the Human Resource Development ministry and is supposed to become part of the government's next Five-Year plan.[23]

We hope that the proposal will be fully funded in order to foster a new generation of translators and encourage rich exchange of what methods work best for inter-Indian language translation and Indian-to-English lan-

[23] *Lyric: Language for Communication News* (28 December 2006): http://www.lyriclabs.com/latest_news_8.asp. For the full proposal, see knowledgecommission.gov.in/downloads/recommendations/ProposalNationalTranslationMission.pdf

guage translation. We return to the larger topic of what makes a quality and culturally sensitive translation at the end of this introduction.

The renewed debate: who are to be counted among 'Indian writers'?

In 1997, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian Independence, the *New Yorker* published a special double issue purporting to represent contemporary Indian fiction. It featured writing by Indian writers in English living abroad. In this issue, Salman Rushdie wrote that both fiction and nonfiction composed in the fifty years since Independence "by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen 'recognized' languages of India [...] and, indeed, this new and still burgeoning 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has made to the world of books."[24]

Five years later, in February 2002, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) hosted a conference in New Delhi and Neemrana, Rajasthan, called "At Home in the World." The conference was set up to discuss how language choice influences literary production and circulation, the roles of translation, and the canonical place or value of diasporic or NRI (non-resident Indian) writers. The chief honoree of the conference was the newly minted Nobel Laureate, V.S. Naipaul, and the majority of the writers invited to speak at this conference were those writing in English, many of whom lived overseas. Among the forty or so invitees who lived in India, at least a third of them wrote primarily in English. Clearly English, both diasporic and Indian, was the dominant language of literary production at what turned out to be a very contentious and provocative conference. Controversy marked the gathering at the opening session, when, in his keynote, Naipaul expressed ideas similar to Rushdie's piece in the *New Yorker*. Naipaul determined that there were no good *bhasha* writers and a very limited audience for *bhasha* writing. He also lamented

[24] Salman Rushdie, "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You!" *New Yorker* (23 June 1997): 50.

the state of higher education in English literature at major Western universities and the paucity of well-trained literary critics.[25]

We must bear in mind that this conference, which was sponsored by the Indian government, was very politically motivated. The BJP government, which had adopted regressive Hindu nationalist philosophies, also embraced economic globalization passionately. Under the BJP government, India pursued an aggressive nuclear weapons program, emphasized foreign investment and development of a high-tech economy, and worked to embrace the Indian diaspora for predominantly economic reasons. In order to attract NRI investments, the government undertook several cultural and political initiatives that have continued under the current Congress rule. These initiatives include the establishment of PIO (person of Indian origin cards) and Overseas Citizenship of India program (dual citizenship) for those Indians who have migrated to other nations but who are neither from Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka nor Romani people. NRIs have been honored at the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas since 2004, and this conference was an attempt to claim the literary honors achieved by diasporic Indians to establish Indian global and cultural superiority. Prime Minister Atal Behari Bajpayee, himself a noted Hindi poet, presented this rosy picture:

> Every Indian family, every Indian citizen, and every Indian who is a part of the Indian diaspora is today exploring, asserting, adopting but rarely ever abandoning their Indian identity. This process of change presents fertile ground for literary energy and expression. The change it brings in ordinary life, the new equations it forges in all frameworks, the hopes it kindles in the dispossessed and the energy it gives to the upwardly mobile, all this constitutes the pageantry of India.[26]

Without a doubt, the Indian diaspora has played a major part in the promulgation of Indian writing in English, as is obvious from the fame of Rushdie and Naipaul. But how do we define the diaspora? How do we include Naipaul (the grandson of Indian indentured laborers in Trinidad) and Anita Rau Badami (a more recent voluntary Indian immigrant to

[25] For the full text of Naipaul's speech, see "Inaugural Address," in *At Home in the World*, ed. K. Satchidanandan et al. (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2005): 11–12.

[26] K. Satchidanandan, *At Home in the World*, 7.

Canada) as Indian writers? Clearly, in most of these cases it is ethnic origin that defines the literary canon to which these writers belong and not their country of residence.

The *New Yorker* and the Neemrana conference purported to explore the future of whatever might be designated 'Indian literature', thereby building an influential and controversial portrait of contemporary Indian literature that extends beyond Rushdie's or Naipaul's comments. Yet the portrait painted was a counterfeit, which ignored whole genres and bodies of work.[27] Most critically, English was privileged as *the* language of creative expression in modern India. By contrast, literatures in Indian languages, also called vernacular or *bhasha* literatures, were not only marginalized but also denigrated by prominent intellectuals like Rushdie and Naipaul who command attention on the world stage. It is not surprising, then, that tensions exist between English-language and *bhasha* writers, no matter their location, especially given the disproportionate amount of media attention accorded to each.

Further conversation about the South Asian canon and who writes for whom and why have often taken as a starting point Rushdie's remarks, which were subsequently restated in the preface to his anthology *Mirrorwork*. The remarks irked many prominent Indian writers who write in regional languages because he dismissed all vernacular writing as less relevant to Indian literature than English language writing. Rushdie's inclusion of only one non-English story smacked of tokenism and indicated his lack of familiarity with *bhasha* writing.[28] Rushdie proceeded as if the Sahitya Akademi and its work didn't matter and didn't exist, as if Indian writers were parochial and insignificant, and as if the vernacular publishing industry was not worthy of consideration. In a later interview with Christopher Hitchens, he further underscored his ignorance by condemning the parochial themes of *bhasha* literature, implying that writers' narrow and simplistic vision, focussed on ideas such as 'village life is hard', had led to their neglect on the world scene.[29]

[27] It must be noted that the genre of fiction is over represented in these discussions of Indian literature. Also, a disproportionate number of the writers are from the diaspora in both of these contexts.

[28] The only translated piece included in the anthology was Saadat Hassan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh."

[29] Salman Rushdie, "Interview" with Christopher Hitchens, *The Progressive* 61 (10 October 1997): 40.

More writers and critics have responded to Rushdie's arrogant tone and lack of logic than we can possibly incorporate here, but Rushdie's ignorance must be noted.[30] As Arnab Chakladar notes in this book, Rushdie's short list of praiseworthy vernacular language writers is both arbitrary and odd, containing the names of a few writers (thereby representing only a few of India's languages) who wrote during the first generation after Independence. Rushdie cannot be relied upon to be a judge of the large fields of writing he is tucking away into a closet marked "unworthy of our time."[31]

In the past few years, Rushdie has taken pains to encourage translation from other languages, including Indian languages, through public lectures as the President of the PEN (poets, playwrights, essayists, editors, and novelists) American Center, and we applaud this action. Nevertheless, his initial rush to marginalize a whole body of writers whose literary heritage is centuries older than that of American letters had the unfortunate consequence of creating divisions just when Indian writers were beginning to receive more attention outside of India. It would only be fair to acknowledge another trend at the other end of the spectrum, however, and that is a wholesale acceptance of *bhasha* writing, especially in the genre of the short story. For example, the Sahitya Akademi's English-language journal *Indian Literature* seems to have no critical perspective as such, as Francesca Orsini points out, and instead just accepts without comment "the value assigned by original regional critics, in line with its policy of pan-Indian federalism [… thus] the equivalence of other systems of taste and meaning is taken for granted."[32] That is not to say that meritorious stories do not appear in those pages, but it does suggest that the journal gives space to an uneven mix of offerings as far as literary quality is concerned. Another project that too sweepingly marginalizes anglophone literature

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[30] See, for instance, Amit Chaudhuri, "Modernity and the Vernacular," in *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature*, ed. Chaudhuri (New York: Vintage, 2004): xvii–xxii, and S. Shankar, "Midnight's Orphans of a Postcolonialism Worth its Name," *Cultural Critique* 56 (Winter 2004): 64–95.

[31] It is worth asking who Rushdie's "our" is; one can imagine that Rushdie believes he is speaking not for Westerners but for a larger group of subjects residing anywhere who are cosmopolitan literary connoisseurs. Notably, he is not concerned to define this, as it would draw attention to those whom he excludes.

[32] Francesca Orsini, "India in the Mirror of World Fiction," in *Other Worlds: Selections from New Left Review* (Calcutta: Seagull, 2006): 141.

and has not put sufficient time into translation is Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's *Women Writing in India*, vol. 2. While the achievements of this volume in terms of reintroducing a body of nationalist and feminist work are many, we agree with Sabin that the dismissal in the Introduction of aesthetic criteria as a Western bourgeois over-indulgence is difficult to accept when most of the stories, at least in these translations, seem stuck to the page rather than encapsulating the authors' fierce activist perspectives.[33]

In terms of content analysis, literary critic Jasbir Jain has stated that regional language Indian writers are "often more radical and wide-ranging as barriers of class and gender are crossed."[34] Meenakshi Mukherjee, also well-known for her critiques of Indian writing in English, more specifically contends that the novel in English seems anxious to establish its "Indian-ness," a concern that does not seem to pervade *bhasha* novels as they flesh out local contours. Mukherjee speculates that it is less organic for English to allude to "folk tales, films, riddles, nonsense verse, nursery rhymes, slogans and street corner culture."[35] Bishnupriya Ghosh convincingly argues that Mukherjee's comments are more accurate for novels between 1930 and 1980, when India sought to unify among regional variations.[36]

Regarding reactions to patterns in diasporic literary content, there exists a creeping 'diaspora fatigue' – a dismissal of diasporic writing as too narrowly focussed on immigrant issues. This fatigue is experienced not merely by resident Indian writers. In "Of Foreigners and Fetishes," for instance, Sheetal Majithia argues forcefully that South Asian American fiction can be accused of a cookie-cutter theme of hybrid identity.[37] Moreover, she contends that this American fiction is celebrated because it allows readers to fetishize a simple version of immigrant assimilation which ignores terrifying geopolitical flux and contradictions. Iyer's article

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[33] Marjorie Sabin, "Review: Anthologies of Modern Indian Literature," *College English* 68.1 (2005): 96.

[34] Jasbir Jain, *Writing Women Across Cultures* (Jaipur: Rawat, 2002): 130.

[35] Mukherjee quoted in Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004): 21.

[36] Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across*, 21.

[37] Sheetal Majithia. "Of Foreigners and Fetishes: A Reading of Recent South Asian American Fiction," *SAMAR: South Asian Magazine of Action and Reflection* 14 (Fall–Winter 2001), online: http://www.samarmagazine.org/archive/article.php?id=59

in this volume takes up this stereotyping of diasporic themes at greater length. She argues that as these works are catalyzed by the writer's dislocation, they have to be read in the context of that dislocation. A writer's passport does not determine whether he/she has the proper proximity to produce representations of any worth. Writers, critics, publishers, and readers must seek to avoid nationalistic and linguistic chauvinism on the one hand and self-congratulatory displays of closeness to global networks on the other.

The false picture painted by Western book awards and the promotion of celebrity authors

Insufficient acknowledgement has been paid to the way in which the English-language media, in both the USA and India, promote privileged authors who reside in multiple places or outside of India and carefully exclude any mention of the economic, geopolitical, and institutional realities that give these writers a commercial advantage. (The most recent examples of this are Kiran Desai, who won the Man Booker Prize in 2006 for *Inheritance of Loss*, and Vikram Chandra, whose most recent novel, *Sacred Games*, was reviewed in major newspapers and literary magazines such as the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and the *Seattle Times*.) In the past few decades in particular this promotion is accomplished particularly effectively by US and British prizes, which can turn a writer into an instant celebrity and give an exponential boost to their book sales.

Graham Huggan's writing has illuminated the political and cultural work that the Booker prize performs: the Booker McConnell Company's coffers were filled by its participation in a brutish colonial structure from the 1830s onward.[38] The prize, first established in 1969, can be argued to bring money and prestige to postcolonial writers as a neocolonial strategy that distracts from the hegemonic corporations' curtailing of opportunities for citizens in the postcolonial nations. Since 1981, the Booker has honored writers from India, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand, and Huggan sees the Booker's focus on India, particularly in 1981 and 1997 (and in 2006), as a method of promoting British white tolerance and

[38] Graham Huggan, "Prizing Otherness: A Short History of the Booker," *Studies in the Novel* 29.3 (Fall 1997): 412–31.

promoting a cozy tale of English language as the great unifier.[39] The Booker also seems to designate citizenship by the passport carried. An interesting point to note here is that although Kiran Desai divides her time between the USA and India, she qualified for the Man Booker because she had not taken US citizenship.[40]

James English, author of *The Economy of Prestige* (2005), the first book-length study of the rise of prizes in literature and the arts, offers plentiful evidence that a "project of cultural postcolonialization" comes with great costs to the postcolonies themselves.[41] In his overview, he documents the way prizes such as the Nobel for Literature inevitably produce a host of other prizes that claim to be similar yet are essentially different in some crucial particular. Fearful that lauding authors who have niche audiences may be deemed too provincial, "many prizes hedge by drifting over time toward the cultural mainstream" and thus resemble "more closely the scope and criteria of the dominant awards" (65). There is, then, a frenzy of proliferating prizes, most without restrictive criteria beyond genre.[42] Furthermore, English shows how judges enjoy far less autonomy than at first appears. In most open competitions, 98% of submissions are put aside by the administrating organization itself; thus the judges are left with a tiny group from which to choose. Routinely, as well, juries have been enlarged of late, an act that indirectly gives more decision-making power to the administrators of the prize. As English explains, "the tendency for factions to emerge in a larger jury, especially given the greater scope for administrators to install a 'celebrity,' a 'man in the street' or some other ostensible representative of ordinary tastes, drives these groups toward consensus and compromise, toward safe, obvious and expected choices" (138).

English amply demonstrates that "the global market for cultural prestige" will "impose its increasingly transnational system of values" and thereby shift both monetary and symbolic success and energy away from

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[39] Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic* (London & NY: Routledge, 2001).

[40] She explains that the election of George Bush stopped her from wanting American citizenship. See Laura Barton, "A Passage from India," *The Guardian* (12 October 2006): books.guardian.co.uk/manbooker2006/story/0,,1920237,00.html#article _continue

[41] James English, *The Economy of Prestige* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2005): 281. Further page references are in the main text.

[42] The US numbers are striking: while there were 48 literary prizes in 1935, the number jumped to 310 by 1964 and 367 by 1976. English, *Economy*, 327.

the local stage and make forms valuable "only to the degree that they may be repackaged or recontextualized for mainstream consumption" (282). Although we lack space to detail English's many case histories, his analysis includes a minute examination of the promotion of Mobil's Pegasus and Booker award-winning novel *the bone people* (1984) as the first "globally consecrated Maori novel." English argues that the author, Keri Hulme, was raised and educated as a white anglophone New Zealander and was "at most one-eighth Maori"; yet subsequent paperback editions proclaim her a Maori and delete her mixed heritage (319). He shows how selecting a book that can be announced as representing an endangered people, the Maori, allows Mobil (now ExxonMobil) to be seen as a transnational hero attentive to the 'little people'. Furthermore, the book's "trauma and recovery" plotline and "New Age mysticism" permit it to be properly constituted as a "universalist" (and therefore, we might add, reassuringly non-radical) text (319). English' argument suggests that canons of world literature are shaped by imperialistic structures. As English summarizes, those who have the most power in

> these cultural games (by which I do not mean simply the judges […] but the selectors of judges, the philanthropic overseers or corporate sponsors, and the media that publicize the triumphs and the scandals) do so from an increasingly transnational vantage, less and less dependent on state sponsorship of cultural awards […] and more and more indifferent to national literatures as such. (312)

India, too, has its fair share of awards. National awards have been given to honor brilliant literary creation since 1954, with the yearly Sahitya Akademi award winners in 22 languages, and since 1961 for the Jnanpith, the nation's highest literary award, which comes with Rs. 500,000, presented by the Jnanpith Trust, publisher of the *Times of India*. In 1998, the Hutch Crossword prize was inaugurated – encouraging, in that it was designed not only to reward Indian writers with a high amount of money (Rs. 300,000) but also to reward translators. The award prides itself on being a marketing tool specifically, stating on their website, "It is the only Indian award that not only recognizes and rewards good writing but also actively promotes the authors and their books."[43] In sum: the economic, political, and cultural/symbolic inequity between North and South is

[43] See http://www. crosswordbookstores.com

highlighted by North American educated people's inability to name more than two languages that are spoken in India, let alone these award-winning authors and their creative works.

Bhasha writers: deprived of an audience outside of India

American ignorance both feeds and is the result of an abysmal translation rate. For instance, out of the 185,000 adult trade books published last year in the USA, a mere 874 titles were translated.[44] It is painfully obvious that the so-called 'global marketplace' is a Western-dominated place: it is clear that only a tiny percentage of non-English original works trickle slowly into English translation, and even then are much more likely to be circulated if deemed immediately user-friendly to Western readers. Many works have not received the promotion and larger audience they deserve even within, let alone outside of, India.

So that the degree of inaccessibility is clear, we draw your attention briefly to two cases that, using library holdings data as evidence, demonstrate their degree of availability to an international library-going public. Although the quality of the translations understandably influences circulation and reception, this question is put to the side for now in order to make a case about the numbers alone.

Consider, first, Indira Goswami (also known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami), the Assamese writer who has the most exposure outside of her state.[45] She won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 and the Jnanpith in 2000. In the past forty years she has written over a hundred short stories and more than sixteen novels.[46] After nineteen years of writing, the first English translation was brought out in 1986. Over a period of eighteen subsequent years, four more of her fictional works were published in English editions.

Yet translation by itself does little if the circulation of the books is poor. One way to measure circulation, though it cannot tell the whole story, is to look at the world's largest library database, WorldCat, which

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[44] Catherine Abbott, "Found in Translation," *Publisher's Weekly* (25 April 2005): 13.

[45] G. Vinayak, "I've Never Alienated My Writings from My Life," *Rediff Special* (4 March 2002): http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/mar/04spec.htm

[46] In 1999 she also won Florida International University's Tulsi Award in the USA.

represents catalog holdings from over 9,000 libraries in ninety-six countries and has records in 400 languages (OCLC website). The highest number of WorldCat libraries possessing an English work of Goswami's is thirty-two (for a translation of *Neel Kanti Braja*). Goswami's *The Saga of South Kamrup* (1993), which became an award-winning film, *Adahya*, in India, is owned by twenty-eight libraries, and the others by twenty-five or fewer. The most circulated edition is published by Apt Books, which has a branch in New York; the rest are Indian presses. Here we see obvious indications of the unequal distribution of resources to Indian publishers versus American ones, as well as the assumption that there is insufficient public interest in these works.

Similarly, we must ask about the works of Ashapurna Devi, the prolific Bengali writer whose keen critiques of patriarchal society were far ahead of her time. Devi, born in 1909, began publishing in the 1950s. She has written 242 novels and thirty-seven collections of short stories. Her first English translation was only available in 1978 after twenty-two years of publication. Until 2004, when the first volume, *Pratham Pratisruti*, appeared as *The First Promise*, only the middle volume (*Subarnalata*, 1967) of Devi's trilogy, her most praised work, was available. Her translations total a mere six; furthermore, the most extensively circulated translation (*Subarnalata)* is owned by only forty-two WorldCat libraries.

These two examples are meant simply as a brief placeholder for the huge set of themes that English readers are shut out from, given the tiny percentage of Indian literature available. Goswami has said that high-quality, untranslated regional literature is like a "diamond" hidden "in a dark pit."[47] This obscurity deprives audiences of original work that challenges the status quo. At this moment, when so many publishers are mindlessly focussed on the bottom line, and the only name that guarantees sales is "Oprah," it seems that few readers are likely to get a chance to see more facets of this diamond anytime soon.

Another element that affects how translations become available in the USA is the name of the translator. The works of Mahasweta Devi are a case in point. Devi's works have become familiar to many American academics simply because the internationally known theorist Gayatri Spivak has translated and analyzed them. This obviously gave these texts a high

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[47] Puravee Kalita. "The Works, Life and Philosophy of Mamoni Roysom Goswami" (1 October, 2005): http://www.geocities.com/bipuljyoti/authors/mamoni.html

degree of attention and exposure. Although Spivak's translation project is intended to break the hegemony of English, at this moment it is impossible, despite her best efforts, to divorce Spivak's reputation from Devi's English reception.

Before leaving this topic, here is a final illustration of the difficulty of receiving scholarly attention by Western academics. Borrowing David Damrosch's admittedly imprecise but nonetheless valuable method of finding patterns, we examined the number of articles and books listed in the *MLA* (Modern Language Association) *Bibliography* written in the past decade on a handful of contemporary Indian writers – *bhasha* writers, resident English writers, and diasporic writers.[48] Naturally, there will be peaks at the time of special issues of journals devoted to an author or the times when their books were fresh off the press; also, authors from any nation can rise and fall in esteem over decades, so all of these ideas must be factored in. However, esteemed writers are normally studied for several decades at least, so the age of the writer should only increase the number of scholars who might potentially publish on that author.[49] The span of 1995–2006 does indicate that the attention of MLA scholars has been excessively filtered towards certain authors, most of them diasporic or, if not, then winners of one or more Western awards. Rushdie has exponentially higher honors than anyone else with 495 entries; he has eclipsed the Nobel laureate Tagore, who has 94; and the Big Three of R.K. Narayan (with 72), Mulk Raj Anand (with 18) and Raja Rao (with 38) just get by. Amitav Ghosh has a respectable 60 entries, but most resident writers have a much smaller profile, especially *bhasha* writers.

The same pattern of favoring diasporic writing in particular applies to women writers (though there is as of yet no female celebrity who has received scholarly attention equivalent to that accorded to Rushdie). Bharati Mukherjee, the most widely anthologized South Asian American writer, who has been publishing since 1972, exceeds with 165 entries the cosmopolitan foremother of Indian English letters, Anita Desai (63 entries), as well as such earlier resident writers as Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara

[48] David Damrosch, "World Literature in a Postcolonial, Hypercanonical Age," *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006): 43–53.

[49] Damrosch does not claim that scholarly publications indicate classroom use, and this is certainly not an exact relationship. However, instructors may be more likely to teach books when good scholarship is available for reference.

Sahgal, and Ismat Chugtai, with nine, eighteen and eleven entries respectively. Arundhati Roy's one book of fiction and several works of nonfiction have been covered 70 times, whereas Shashi Deshpande, who first published in 1978, has a mere 22 (tied with the South Asian American author Chitra Divakaruni, whose first book appeared as recently as 1995). Jhumpa Lahiri has already had eighteen works penned about her, while Mahasweta Devi receives thirteen entries; Ashapurna Devi has four; Indira Goswami a mere one. Clearly, a place at the table of Western scholarship is missing for *bhasha* writers as well as resident writers of India.

Translation: building bridges, creating labyrinths

While translation clearly has the power to act as a connector between cultures and languages within India and beyond, even in ideal circumstances it cannot function as a cure-all. Advances in the speed and convenience of translation are to be celebrated, but the economic and political reach of a few nations can ensure that only certain books, films, and TV newscasts in certain languages are available to a global citizenry. Michael Cronin's worthwhile *Translation and Globalization* enables readers to see both the limits and the possibilities of translation in this age of high-tech equipment and international collaboration and co-optation. Cronin reminds us that we depend on translation in an age of globalization to decrease environmental and human destruction: already we are on a very alarming path to wipe out indigenous knowledge of the earth that has been part of human tribal survival for centuries. Translation has been seen "as either a threat or a godsend" to a minority language.[50] On the one hand, translation classically strengthens the range of a language and promotes diversity by making more information available to any one individual.[51] Yet, paradoxically, translation into a dominant monoculture such as English can lead to an eventual situation of fewer works being composed in tongues other than English.

Translation studies, which began to be known on its own apart from linguistics and comparative literature departments in the USA about twenty years ago, has gained momentum with the able interventions of scholars such as Daniel Weissbort, Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett and

[50] Cronin, *Translation*, 5.
[51] Cronin, *Translation*, 73.

Gayatri Spivak. The most widely read work has brought renewed attention to conscientious linguistic translation as a form of cultural truth-telling. Both Spivak and Homi Bhabha have argued persuasively that the act of translation may play a pivotal role in disrupting stable cultural identities. Spivak rightfully contends that translations must maintain cultural autonomy rather than get dumbed down to a monochrome English "translatese."[52] Similarly, Cronin is as interested in what translation resists as in what it can accomplish. He argues that we need to divorce ourselves from the notion of the ideal translation as a substitute that frees us from ever again consulting the original. This notion unwittingly upholds one of the worst aspects of global corporate culture, a consistency that threatens to turn all of our spaces into the same space.[53]

We agree with Cronin; better translations will result from accepting the fact that, as Steven Ungar says, there is "a core of language that resists translation."[54] At its best, translation may function less as a bridge than as a labyrinth that leads to a final point of comprehension that may not conform to the land that the reader was expecting. Furthermore, Western scholars have been all too prone to jump on the 'culturally rescued through English translation' bandwagon. Harish Trivedi has sounded the alarm: recent postcolonial theorists, in their overemphasis on hybridity and cultural translation, can block us from seeing that too little actual linguistic translation is being funded. As he writes, "There is an urgent need perhaps to protect and preserve some little space in this postcolonial, postmodernist world, where newness constantly enters through cultural translation, for some old and old-fashioned literary translation" lest a "bilingual, bicultural" world is eroded altogether as we trumpet our openness to receiving English-language-only descriptions of cultures.[55] We must heed S. Shankar's warning, in a similar mode, that the transnational and hybrid

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[52] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 182. For a discussion of how a third space of newly emerging culture questions the authority of the source language in translation, see Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990): 207–21.

[53] Cronin, *Translation*, 129.

[54] Steven Ungar, "Writing in Tongues: Thoughts on the Work of Translation," *Comparative Literature*, ed. Haun Saussy, 132.

[55] Harish Trivedi, "Translating Culture versus Cultural Translation," *Journal of the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies* 2 (Autumn 2004): 43.

have become increasingly privileged in postcolonial writing, placing the expressions of a specific location, language, or rooted group in an inferior sidebar. As Shankar states, we must carefully differentiate between qualities of provincialism and cultural autonomy, rather than elide them. We hope that Trivedi's and Shankar's incisive words will cause postcolonial scholars from all locations to redirect their energies towards neglected *bhasha* texts and/or texts with a "vernacular sensibility."[56]

As many Indian scholars – most recently Ganesh Devy – have noted, Western theories of translation do not seem appropriate in the Indian context, given that for centuries the concept of transcreation has been accepted; that is, translations into other Indian languages are more often made themselves from English or Hindi translations.[57] This state of affairs leads Shibani Phukan to state that "if there is an Indian theory of translation, perhaps its distinction lies in its refusal to posit an overarching universal theory of translation […]. The politics of representation has led to the realization of the danger of homogenizing, marginalizing and domesticating texts while translating."[58] Of course, realization of danger is a starting point but does not necessarily prevent acts of domestication. We are wary of claims that any one group of translators can entirely avoid some semblance of speaking for the marginalized.[59]

[56] S. Shankar, "Midnight's Orphans," 85.

[57] Ganesh Devy, "Translation and Literary History: An Indian View," in *Postcolonial Translation Theory*, ed. Harish Trivedi & Susan Bassnett (London: Routledge, 1999): 187. For other Indian perspectives on translation one would do well to turn to *Translation as Recovery* (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2004) and Rita Kothari, *Translating India: The Cultural Politics of English* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2003).

[58] Shibani Phukan, "Towards an Indian Theory of Translation," *Wasafiri* 40 (2003): 30.

[59] As a final note, we agree with Sachidananda Mohanty, who declares that those who cannot read the original translation should not be permitted, as they so often are, to write reviews of the translation, for this is to ignore the ethical mission of the translator, who could then be easily tempted to take a quick and easy way out rather than wrestle with subtexts, idioms and dictions. See S. Mohanty, "Translation Across Cultures: The Ethics of a Literary Translation," *Journal of the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies* 2 (Autumn 2004): 22–34.

Overview of this volume

We divide this volume into three sections reflecting the three major concerns of this book. Section I examines the development of canons and theorizes about the relationship between English language and *bhasha* literatures in India. Section II presents the perspectives of three major publishers in India on the challenges and the opportunities available for Indian literatures in India and in the global marketplace. Section III closely examines the place of translation and transcreation in bringing Indian-language literatures to Indian and non-Indian readers.

Section I brings together three academic essays, an essay by a Marathi playwright, a memoir by an Indian English poet, and an interview with a diasporic writer to examine who authors write for and how they are received in different markets. This section nuances the "language debates" (i.e., the debate over the presumed hegemony or English and the alleged neglect of Indian language writings). In "Embattled Canons," Nalini Iyer argues for the need to understand Indian-English writing as heterogeneous and considers the intertextual work of the South Asian American writers Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Divakaruni, and Meena Alexander in order to demonstrate that diasporic literatures are engaged in a dialogue with the American canon and other American ethnic writers and need to be read differently from English-language writing by resident Indians. Lavina Dhingra Shankar states that diasporic Indian writing in English is controversial owing to the steps that, it seems, are currently necessary to appeal to a large non-Indian reading public. She studies the writing of Chitra Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri, arguing that ethnic writers are often successful on the basis of their works' being exotic but not too foreign – they stand out, but seem easily accessible to audiences outside the ethnic group. Josna Rege's essay examines C.S. Lakshmi's (Ambai's) and Rukhsana Ahmad's work because it directly challenges the presumed East/West paradigm within the debate about English language dominance. Rege argues that these writers inhabit multiple spaces and translate themselves, creating a global cosmopolitical framework that challenges the presumptions of location made by those who argue that English-language writing equals Western colonialism/hegemony.

In contrast to these three essays written by US-based academics on canons and audiences, the distinguished Marathi playwright Mahesh Elkunchwar presents one *bhasha* writer's perspective on the language

debate., Elkunchwar candidly examines the relationship between language and creativity, the place of English language media in inflating the successes of English-language writers, and the economic stakes involved in writing for a 'vernacular' or global audience. By contrast, Pradip Sen, a poet and founding member of the Calcutta Writers Workshop, examines the history of this workshop and argues for the importance of English-language writing in India. In Nina McConigley's interview, Chitra Divakaruni equally frankly addresses the ways in which diasporic writers such as herself engage with Indian *bhasha* literatures and the role that translation plays in her teaching and the propagation of her writing in India and other countries.

Section II brings together three major voices from India's publishing world. Urvashi Butalia, one of the founders of India's first feminist press, Kali for Women (now Zubaan, Delhi), writes of the history of publication in India, particularly the independent presses' support of Indian-language literatures. Although Butalia welcomes the renewed attention to Indian literature, she also wonders if this is not colonialism in a new guise come back to haunt India. Butalia forecasts big changes ahead and explains how corporate decisions do not usually favor indigenous authors, especially those who do not write in English. In the second piece in this section, Geeta Dharmarajan and other editors of Katha Press, Delhi, a leading non-profit publisher of translations from Indian languages, speak to Bonnie Zare about the scope and success of Katha's projects and the future of the translation publishing industry in India. Finally, Mini Krishnan, series editor for translations at Oxford University Press in Chennai, speaks to Nalini Iyer about the challenges of publishing translations at two major multinational publishing houses, Macmillan and OUP. Krishnan, who has edited three works that have won the Hutch-Crossword translation award and who has published several Dalit writers, strikes a cautiously optimistic note about translation rates increasing. The third section of this volume focusses on translations and transcreations. Translation studies is moving in a productive direction by acknowledging the limits of translation and by desacralizing the original text. It is likely that this trend will permit and encourage more inventive and creative choices to account for semantic and cultural differences as well as distinct literary conventions.

Translations that can best accomplish this, we feel, respect the cultural nuances of the original linguistic choices and endeavor to explain or interpret their context-dependency. Anushiya Sivanarayan closely analyses

Lakshmi Holmström's English rendering of Bama's *Karukku* (an author discovered by Mini Krishnan, who edited this translation by Holmström) and how it alters the original. Sivanarayan shows us that we must make scrupulous provisions for linguistic specificity, and that a translator's overview of these provisions is needed to assist readers who wish to connect with the narrative's starting voice. Complementing Sivanarayanan's emphasis on caste and language in the translation of a Tamil Dalit text is S. Shankar's essay on the role of translation as interpretation. Shankar writes of translating an eighteenth-century Tamil song, "Alaipaayuthey," in his recent novel *No End to the Journey*. Shankar pays attention to genre transformation as well as performative elements and illustrates how translation gives new life to a text. In an interview that follows this essay, Shankar elaborates on how he, as a literary critic and writer, cultivates translation in theory and practice.

Christi Merrill's essay on translation practice, which discusses Manto's "Toba Tek Singh," suggests "a way of understanding the relationship of the vernacular to cosmopolitan sensibilities" and "the felicities and fallibilities of comparativism as a methodology." Merrill further problematizes the notion of a text's origin, pointing out the ethical quandaries that may be overlooked in Judith Butler's recent work on translation. Arnab Chakladar's essay in this section looks to the future of translation and discusses how the Internet might offer us ways of working with translation across national and linguistic boundaries. Translation is likely to grow and flourish in the new environments offered by online sites such as Parabaas, a Bangla writing and translation site, and *anothersubcontinent .com*, which allows the writer or translator to engage in dialogue directly with the site's readers and elaborate on their creative process and choices.

The table of contents itself indicates that the debate about the sidelining of resident Indian writers or non-English fictions is not a case of petty infighting but will and should continue to provoke essential questions about the economic and political resource allocation in a global world. It is imperative to recognize and contribute to places that are maintaining opportunities for dialogue, for all storytelling tongues need to be able to reach as many listening ears as possible.

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I

Canonizing Authors, Authorizing Canons

Embattled Canons

The Place of Diasporic Writing in Indian English Literature

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IN 1997, ON THE OCCASION of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian Independence, the *New Yorker* published a special double issue on contemporary Indian fiction. In this issue, Salman Rushdie infamously dismissed Indian literatures in vernacular languages as inconsequential and thereby unleashed a controversy about the place of English language writing in Indian literature.[1] Many critics, including S. Shankar, Amit Chaudhuri and Bishnupriya Ghosh, have explored Rushdie's controversial remarks and have variously defended vernacular (Shankar, Chaudhuri) or defended cosmopolitical anglophone Indian writing (Ghosh).[2] However, what critics have left unexplored is discussion about the heterogeneity of anglophone writing. In this essay, I argue that we need to recognize how diasporic anglophone writing differs from anglophone writing by resident Indian writers. The critics of diasporic writers charge the authors with inauthenticity in cultural representation, with lack of familiarity with vernacular literatures, and with pandering to Western

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[1] Salman Rushdie, "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You!" *New Yorker* (23 June 1997): 50.

[2] See Amit Chaudhuri, "Modernity and the Vernacular," in *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature*, ed. Chaudhuri (New York: Vintage, 2004): xvii–xxii; S. Shankar, "Midnight's Orphans of a Postcolonialism Worth its Name," *Cultural Critique* 56 (Winter 2004): 64–95; and Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004).

readers' orientalist desires. Using South Asian American writing as an example, I wish to demonstrate that diasporic works need to be understood within the historical and cultural realities of migration to North America post-1965. I show that reading Indo-American texts solely as Indian literary works leads to critics overlooking the writers' engagement with various literary canons – American, *bhasha*, postcolonial. My purpose is not to engage in a comparative study of resident Indian and diasporic Indian anglophone narratives that might lead to overgeneralizations about both. Nor is it my purpose to rehash the debate over whether English is an Indian language; this debate was popular right after political independence in many postcolonial societies, the most notable commentary on the subject being probably that of Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's *Decolonising the Mind*. The works of R.K. Narayan, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, David Davidar and other English writers resident in India (or, in the case of I. Allen Sealey, in India and New Zealand) attest to the pervasiveness of English in India and also the ability of English to capture various vernacular sensibilities. I begin my discussions with a brief exploration of Rushdie's comments in the *New Yorker* and his limited vision of anglophone writing. Then I argue for the need to read diasporic writing within historical and cultural contexts, focussing on Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Divakaruni, and Meena Alexander in order to show how each writer negotiates and critiques multiple canons as she positions herself as an Indo-American writer.

What is anglophone Indian writing exactly?

The *New Yorker* special issue featured writing by Rushdie, Desani, Abraham Verghese, Amit Chaudhuri, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Vijay Seshadri, Chitra Divakaruni, Jayanta Mahapatra, Max Vadukul, and Shamim Azad. Of these writers, only Shamim Azad's work was translated from Bengali; all of the others are anglophone writers. Only Jayanta Mahapatra is domiciled in India. This same special issue contains a photograph of rising stars of anglophone Indian writing taken in London in May 1997.[3] The photograph includes Vikram Chandra, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Ardashir Vakil, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh and Romesh Gune-

[3] "Group Shot," *New Yorker* (23 June 1997): 118–19.

sekera. The caption reads “A gathering of India’s leading novelists” and features anglophone writers like Roy who live in India and those living abroad such as Mistry (Canada), Ghosh (USA), Vakil (UK), and Rushdie (UK and later USA), and those who make their homes in multiple nations, such as Seth and Anita Desai. It also has a Sri Lankan writer (Romesh Gunesekera) living in Britain.

The *New Yorker* special issue, while commemorating India’s fifty years of independence, was also creating an influential and controversial portrait of contemporary Indian literature that extends beyond Rushdie’s comments. It privileged English as the language of creative expression in modern India, and although Bill Buford, then fiction editor at the *New Yorker,* acknowledged the existence of other Indian languages, he did not comment on this emphasis on English. Both diasporic writing and the genre of fiction were over-represented. All the while, the purpose of this issue was to explore the future of Indian literature. However, what was implied about ‘vernacular’ or *bhasha* literature in the compilation of this issue was forcefully stated by Rushdie in his essay in the magazine.

Rushdie’s remarks, which were subsequently used as a preface to his anthology *Mirrorwork* (co-edited with Elizabeth West), irked many prominent Indian writers who write in various regional languages because he dismissed all vernacular writing as inconsequential. The only *bhasha* work that Rushdie and West deemed worthy of inclusion in the anthology was Saadat Hasan Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh.” What interests me here is not so much Rushdie’s arrogance or ignorance as the conflation of diasporic writing with indigenous anglophone writing (i.e. English-language works produced by writers domiciled in India) into one fluid identity which ignores the differences between native Indo-English writers and diasporic anglophone Indian writers and further overlooks the importance of location in the production of diasporic writing. One is prompted to ask what makes Rushdie’s new canon of rising stars[4] Indian and not Indo-

[4] One must note that in 1997 only Rushdie and Anita Desai had achieved major international recognition. Rushdie laments in his essay that Indian writers are unknown in the West. The authors in the photograph with Rushdie and Anita Desai have all since achieved greater recognition. In 1997 Ardashir Vakil and Kiran Desai had just written their first novels, *Beach Boy*, and *Hullaballoo in the Guava Orchard*, respectively. In 2006, they have each published at least another novel and Kiran Desai won the 2006 Man Booker Prize for her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. Ghosh, Seth and others now vie with Rushdie and Desai for prominence amongst Indian writers.

British or Indo-American, and why a Sri Lankan-British writer is included in the photograph of "Indian writers"? In most of these cases it is the country of birth that defines the literary canon to which these writers belong, not their country of residence, and the inclusion of Gunesekera and Shamim Azad (a Bangladeshi-British writer) as "Indian" tells us much about Indian hegemony in South Asia and also perhaps that readers in the West (like those reading the *New Yorker*) often blur the boundaries between India and other nations in the region. Further, this grouping emphasizes the racialization of diasporic subjects such that, even when a writer has spent almost all his/her life in the diaspora (Meera Syal and Jhumpa Lahiri, for example), he/she is still an "Indian" writer.[5]

Rushdie and the *New Yorker* are not alone in this simplistic labeling of writers based on country of birth. In 2002, when the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) hosted a literary conference, the debate about the place of Indian-English writing gathered impetus. *Outlook*, an Indian news magazine, carried detailed reports and articles on this acrimonious debate. In the pages of this magazine, U.R. Ananthamurthy, Balakrishnan Nimade, Gurdial Singh, and Dilip Chitre critiqued English as an inauthentic language for writing about Indian realities and accused anglophone writers of pandering to the West's desire for the exotic.[6] Shashi Deshpande, who lives in India and writes in English, responded strongly to the *bhasha* writers. Although she did not endorse Rushdie's notion that vernacular literature is inconsequential, she did respond to the charge from the *bhasha* writers regarding English's inauthenticity, and she argued that English did have a place in the Indian literary landscape, as imagination

[5] This split between diasporic and native anglophone writers in the critical discourse about Indian writing is a twentieth-century phenomenon. The English who wrote about India beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were diasporic writers and Din Muhammad, who was the first Indian writer in English, had worked for an Irishman in India, later moved to Ireland with him, and eventually settled in England and wrote an epistolary travel narrative. So one could argue that Indian anglophone writing has been diasporic in its origins and nativized in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For further discussion of the origins of anglophone writing in India, see Vinay Dharwadker's "English in India and Indian English Literature: The Early History 1579–1834," *Comparative Literature Studies* 39.2 (2002): 93–119.

[6] Reddy, "Midnight's Orphans," *Outlookindia.com* (23 February 2002): http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fname=Cover%20Story&fodname=20020225&sid=1

was not bounded by language.[7] Deshpande, however, did remark in an interview that diasporic writing, especially in the USA, was narrow in its focus on immigrant issues and thus ran the risk of being marginalized and trivialized.[8] Rushdie, Deshpande, and the *bhasha* writers share one common idea – diasporic writing in English is 'Indian' if the writer is of Indian origin.

This elision of Indian and Indo-American, Indo-British, Indo-Canadian into one homogenizing category of 'Indian' erases the particular historical, cultural, and political contexts of each of those literary productions. For many diasporic writers, geographical displacement is a defining characteristic and their works deal with more than one culture; they embrace ideas such as nostalgia for a lost land, the lived realities in the new land, the search for home, culture clash, alienation, assimilation and so on. Writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Abraham Verghese, and M.G. Vassanji have produced fine examples of such literature of geographical displacement. Because these works are catalyzed by the writer's dislocation, they have to be read in the context of that dislocation. While the *bhasha* writers dismiss diasporic writers as inauthentic, they do not stop to question why these writers imagine India in the way they do. They lambast writers like Amitav Ghosh for misusing language or misrepresenting landscape, but refuse to recognize that Ghosh's Bengal is not that of Gangopadhyay. Furthermore, critics of diasporic writing dismiss the writer's landscape as imagined, hence 'unreal', while uncritically upholding residence in India and writing in a regional language as providing the stamp of reality to a writer.[9] This perspective implicitly views a native

[7] Shashi Deshpande, "English's Inter-Alia," *Outlook* (11 March 2002): http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fname=Column%20Deshpandey%20(F)&fodname=20020311&sid=1

[8] Deshpande, "Is Literature a Public Toilet?" *Outlookindia.com* (20 April 2001): http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fname=shashi&fodname=20010420&sid=1

[9] Take a recent review of Chitra Divakaruni's *Queen Of Reams* by Ira Pande in *OutlookIndia.com* as an example of the Indian perspective. She writes: "On all perishable goods meant for human consumption, there is a mandatory 'Use by...' date. Something similar needs urgently to be devised for literature, or what passes off as a literary offering nowadays. What has definitely gone off and acquired a distinct pong by now are novels by nri housewives on the immigration experience (contents include sexual abuse, cultural shocks and syrupy nostalgia). At the centre of most such novels is a young girl, often brought up in Calcutta because there is a morbid attraction between Bengali NRIs and novel writing (Bharati Mukherji, Sunetra Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri, to name just a

bhasha writer's work as cultural history (i.e. a record of the changing habits and viewpoints of a people) with respect to his/her regional audience (particularly for those who read the *bhasha*) and ethnography with respect to non-regional audiences (particularly those that access the work through translation). This uncritical assumption of the authenticity of *bhasha* writing overlooks internal displacements of many *bhasha* writers within the nation-state and also the differences of class, caste, urban and rural experiences that make *bhasha* writing heterogeneous. The tendency to view *bhasha* writing in translation as ethnography is equally problematic, since it reduces literary works to sociological treatises and completely overlooks aesthetic traditions in the *bhasha* writing.

While *bhasha* writers dismiss the diaspora, critics like Rushdie do not necessarily speak for all diasporic writers. For example, Rushdie summarily dismisses Bharati Mukherjee in his essay because she views herself as an ethnic American writer,[10] yet he still recognizes that much contemporary Indian writing in English comes from this "diaspora of writers who lay claim to an excess of roots" (50). So, why is Bharati Mukherjee less Indian for Rushdie than Agha Shahid Ali? This tendency to distinguish some diasporic writers as merely 'ethnic' while labeling others as being less parochial because they are 'postcolonial' or 'transnational' is not limited to Rushdie. Ketu Katrak, for example, contrasts Mukherjee's embrace of unhyphenated Americanness with Alexander's identity as an Asian American writer and Jhumpa Lahiri's 'ethno-global' identity: Katrak is most critical of Mukherjee's approach while lauding Lahiri and Alexander for their more progressive perspective.[11] For Katrak, Jhumpa Lahiri is the most progressive of the three writers she discusses – unlike Mukherjee, who erases ethnic identity by refusing a hyphenated label, and unlike Alexander, who connects her South Asian identity to that of other

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few). The cast includes several hysterical or fey Bengali women: aunts, grandmothers et al who can read signs in vegetables, cook up storms in their kitchens and swish ominously through the life of our Bengali heroine, chanting mantras, telling apocryphal stories and deciphering omens." "Rani of Dreams" *Outlookindia.com* (11 April 2005): http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fname=Booksb&fodname=20050 411&sid=1

[10] Bharati Mukherjee has been criticized by many Indo-American academics also because she refuses a hyphenated American identity and insists that the term 'American' includes immigrants such as herself.

[11] Ketu Katrak, "The Aesthetics of Dislocation," *Women's Review of Books* (February 2002): 5–6.

Asian immigrants, Lahiri's 'ethno-global' identity "transcends narrow nationalism" but "celebrates an ethnic heritage along with evoking an exemplary universalist humanism."[12] Yet another response to diasporic writing comes from the common reader in the country of residence. Reviews of Divakaruni, Mukherjee, and others by customers at Amazon.com often emphasize the role that diasporic writers play as cultural informants.[13] Such an approach to writing by immigrants denies these works any possible role as aesthetic objects and insists that writing by the Other can only function as popular ethnography.

What is important to consider in this debate of English vs. *bhasha* writing is not who is more authentic or who has the right to describe India by virtue of his/her location but what makes for the heterogeneity of Indian-English literature. As stated earlier, this essay claims that diasporic writing must be separated from anglophone writing by those domiciled in India.[14] It also argues that diasporic writing needs to be understood in particular historical, geographical, and political contexts. In other words, we should explore Indo-American writing separately from Indo-British or Indo-Caribbean writing. What motivated a Naipaul, while bearing some

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[12] Katrak, "The Aesthetics of Dislocation," 5.

[13] Here is an example of a customer review from Amazon.com from Dec 2002 and it comes from one J. Marren in New Jersey who is ranked a "Top 1000 reviewer" on Amazon. Marren writes about *Sister of My Heart*: "From a cultural standpoint, the picture of a world where women's lives are so totally dictated by their relationship to a man is fascinating. We all know of arranged marriages, but equally important is the power a mother-in-law wields over her new daughter, not to mention her son. No aspect of the newly married couple's lives are (sic) beyond her influence, from dress to family visits to travel to childbearing. And even in modern India among middle class people, the weight of tradition in valuing sons over daughters is enough to ruin lives."

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/customer-reviews/038548951X/ref=cm_rev_next/002-9146683-5650403?ie=UTF8&customer-reviews.sort%5Fby=-SubmissionDate&n=283155&s=books&customer-reviews.start=41>

[14] One could argue that native anglophone writers like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai (especially her early fiction), Vikram Chandra, Shashi Deshpande and others form an internal diaspora because of linguistic dislocation from their 'mother tongue', as *bhasha* writers may conclude, or because they are displaced within the subcontinent from their native places. The geographic dislocation of writers within the subcontinent because of political events like the partition or economic issues such as the migration of labor to megapolises like Bombay or Delhi, although a fascinating subject, is not part of this discussion. I am defining diaspora here as crossing of a nation's political borders and am emphasizing migration to the West, particularly the USA post-1947.

similarity to Bharati Mukherjee, must necessarily also be read with a view to the differences between them, because the particular national histories and literary canons they engage in are quite different. Trinidadian-Indian experience with indentured labor and the formation of an Indo-Trinidadian ethnicity is substantially different from the experience of a post-1965 immigrant to the USA whose encounters with racism and ethnic discrimination are determined largely by US and Indian domestic and foreign policies and histories.

In order to further my argument that this debate on the place of English in 'Indian' writing must be contextualized, I wish to examine Indo-American writing of the last few decades and to explore both parts of the hyphenated term. What makes Indo-American writing Indian and American? The answer to this question goes beyond the simple notion that Indo-American writing is hybrid and expresses cultural clash. Indo-American writing engages in dialogue with both contemporary American literature, especially 'ethnic' American literature, and with anglophone Indian literature in its indigenous, postcolonial, and diasporic manifestations. As 'American' literature, it engages with the themes of migration (both forced and voluntary) and the impact of that migration on the idea of America, such a major preoccupation of many American works from the colonial period onwards.[15] As 'Indian' literature, it explores some of the same contemporary themes that 'postcolonial' English and contemporary *bhasha* writing do. These include the nature of modernity, the state of the nation, the place of language, and the narration of history. While it may be convenient to label the 'Americanness' of some diasporic writers as 'ethnic' writing excessively preoccupied with roots, as does Rushdie, and to celebrate South Asian American writers' engagement with both India and America as progressive, as does Katrak, a careful and extensive reading of South Asian diasporic writing reveals that these labels are limiting and that South Asian American writing is heterogeneous and, furthermore, is made distinctive by its engagement with multiple literary canons.

In this debate between English language writing and *bhasha* writing, we must take into account the heterogeneity of anglophone Indian fiction. Shashi Deshpande's fiction has different concerns from that of Meera

[15] For an excellent discussion of South Asian American writing and the idea of America, see Rajini Srikanth's *The World Next Door: South Asian American Literature and the Idea of America* (Philadelphia PA: Temple UP, 2004).

Syal or Bharati Mukherjee. When a reader blurs the differences between a native anglophone writer like Deshpande, an Indo-British writer like Syal, and an Indo-American writer like Mukherjee, he/she misses the complex dialogue each writer engages in with particular literary traditions, a dialogue that influences the reception, marketing, and critical responses to his/her work. I will explore the work of three major Indo-American writers – Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Divakaruni, and Meena Alexander.[16] Each of these writers has a very distinctive perspective on diaspora, migration, language, and literary canons.

Battling literary canons

Although Indian writers such as Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Dalip Singh Saund, Ved Mehta, and Kartar Dhillon have documented the lives of Indian immigrants coming to the USA prior to 1965,[17] Indo-American writing gained prominence in the late 1970s, and the three writers discussed here – Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, and Chitra Divakaruni – have played major roles in creating and popularizing a canon of Indo-American writing. All three writers engage critically with different literary canons that shape their sensibilities and also their place in the literary world. These literary canons include a *bhasha* canon (whether Bengali or Malayalam), the Western literary canon (British and American literature), the ethnic American literary canon, and postcolonial anglophone writing (especially from India). Their critical engagement with these canons demonstrates the narrowness of such definitions, which function only through exclusion, and also suggests that diasporic writers are neither limited nor

[16] I must note here that the development of Indo-American writers has relied much on highly qualified, often academically trained writers. Mukherjee, Divakaruni, Alexander, Lahiri and Ghosh all have doctorates and several of them work in academic institutions. This connection between academic training and writing is perhaps a reflection of the shift in immigration policy in 1965 which emphasized skills as the criterion for immigration from India and opened the doors to many upper-class Indians seeking graduate education and training in the USA.

[17] See Kartar Dhillon, "The Parrot's Beak," in *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writing by and About Asian American Women*, ed. Asian Women United of California (Boston MA: Beacon, 1989): 214–26; Ved Mehta, "Naturalized Citizen No. 984-5165," in *The Ved Mehta Reader: The Craft of the Essay* (New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1998): 281–302; Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *Caste and Outcaste* (1923; Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 2002); Dilip Singh Saund, *Congressman from India* (New York: Dutton, 1960).

inauthentic but operate within many different cultural and linguistic registers simultaneously.

For instance, Bharati Mukherjee critiques British imperialism and its interconnections with American and Indian history in several of her works. Her 1996 novel, *Holder of the World*,[18] reworks colonial American literature such as the captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson and also rewrites Nathaniel Hawthorne's fictional re-creation of colonial America in *The Scarlet Letter*. Her novel, which begins with the capture of a white settler woman who falls in love with a Native American and then elopes with him, leaving behind a difficult marriage and an infant daughter, plays with the central tension in captivity narratives between desire for and repugnance at Native Americans expressed through the sexualization of the relationship between white settlers and Native Americans. The struggle for political dominance and control of land is then written on the body of the white woman. At the same time, this theme of captivity also links up with the story of Sita in the *Ramayana*, a popular and culturally significant narrative for Hindus.[19] The *Ramayana* also embodies the struggle for land and political control between Aryans and indigenous peoples of India written on the body of the Aryan woman. Mukherjee's women who transgress across racial and sexual boundaries do so willingly and subvert the power of the conqueror. Toward the end of this work, Mukherjee creates a fictional alternative history to one of the most famous American novels, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. By suggesting that Black Pearl, the child of Hannah and an Indian king, is the true source of Hawthorne's narrative and that his novel erases the history of British and American commerce with India, Mukherjee presents us with the notion that histories, even fictional ones, rewrite questions of racial transgressions because such transgressions undermine myths of power necessary for the continuation of political dominance. National literary canons then re-create national histories to reflect the dominant culture's interests; and this situation has not changed over the centuries.

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[18] Bharati Mukherjee, *Holder of the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

[19] For a detailed discussion of this novel, see Nalini Iyer, "Indian/American: Metaphors of the Self in Bharati Mukherjee's *Holder of the World*," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 27.2 (October 1996): 29–46.

In her current trilogy, of which she has published two novels, *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*,[20] Mukherjee takes on the quintessential American theme of a 'roots' search that is also a 'routes' search. In other words, the trilogy explores where we come from and how we get here. Her protagonist Tara Lata Banerjee undertakes a roots/routes search and tells two stories of origins – one concerns the Tree Bride, her nineteenth-century ancestor, while the other concerns John Mist, an English cabin boy in the settlement of Mishtigunj, whose story intertwines with that of the Tree Bride. The Tree Bride is forced to marry a tree as a child because of her bridegroom's untimely death on the way to the wedding ceremony – to be a perpetual wife without the prospect of widowhood was preferable to the status of an inauspicious girl who is neither bride nor widow. She thus occupies a liminal state, both wife and virgin, and eventually becomes a nationalist who fights the British presence in India. Similarly, John Mist also occupies a liminal state by reinventing himself and 'going native', thus, becoming neither English nor Bengali. The Tree Bride's namesake, Tara Lata Banerjee, undertakes a search for her roots and learns that the quest for one's origins is the pursuit of an ever-receding horizon. What one confronts is neither stability nor authenticity but fluidity. If one's Indianness is fluid, then so is one's Americanness in the twenty-first century. Whereas Mukherjee stridently claims her Americanness, she does not uncritically accept whiteness as the norm but desires to compel Americans of all kinds to recognize the fluidity of American identities. Mukherjee has remarked that

> It is that moment in diaspora: white America is not the America of the mythological melting pot that my character Jasmine had bought into in the late eighties – discard your past if you can, or suppress it, and reinvent yourself as often as you need to (and some of those reinventions are hopelessly excessive) until you find a new autobiography. Here it's no longer possible. Neither America nor the non-European immigrant accepts that melting pot myth. It's been discarded. So how do you find a balance to give you meaning in your life, and at the same time not wind up feeling isolated?[21]

[20] Mukherjee, *Desirable Daughters* (New York: Hyperion, 2002), and *The Tree Bride* (New York: Hyperion, 2004).

[21] This is Mukherjee's comment on diasporic identities in an interview about *Desirable Daughters* with Dave Wiech, http://www.powells.com/authors/mukherjee .html

Mukherjee's assumption that America has changed since the 1980s is somewhat naive. When American politicians are debating conservative immigration reforms and when America has enacted draconian immigration measures post-9/11 in the name of security, what most immigrants (especially from Latin America, West Asia, and South Asia) have experienced is state-sponsored racism. Americans may be tired of the metaphor of the melting pot, but in practice national policy still carefully selects who is added to the pot to enhance its flavor and who is set aside as tainting the contents of the pot. Contrary to this remark in the interview, what Mukherjee's fiction demonstrates is that all identities based on nationality are fluid and people experience transformation either by choice or by compulsion. This is apparent in the life of the modern-day Tara Lata Banerjee, who has been formed by the experiences of Indian birth, an anglophile education, marriage, migration to the USA, and divorce; one scene at the close of the novel is symbolic of this.

At the end of *Desirable Daughters*, Tara Lata Banerjee visits her parents in Rishikesh, where they have retired from Calcutta. She looks at the books her parents have brought with them to their new home. On their shelves Bengali literature (Rabindranath Tagore, Bibhuti Bhushan Bhattacharya, and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee) nestles next to works by Sir Walter Scott, Mrs Henry Wood, Jane Austen, and the Brontë sisters. This book collection is not unique; it is representative of many an urban Indian's library. Whereas the *bhasha* texts may vary from Bengali to Tamil or Hindi, the English Victorian fare remains consistent. Rather than struggle to choose between two (or more) canons, many Indians, like Tara Lata and her parents, comfortably negotiate many, as do the diasporic writers who have been formed by the culture of this urban middle class.

Chitra Divakaruni similarly describes how Anju, a character in *Sister of My Heart* and *Vine of Desire*,[22] is intellectually nurtured on Indian mythology, Bengali folk songs, and English feminist writers. Significantly, Anju's widowed mother runs a bookstore in Calcutta where Anju meets her future husband, Sunil, who claims to share her passion for Virginia Woolf, and she fantasizes that in their future they will read *To the Lighthouse* together. Like Woolf's Cam, who experiences betrayal by her authoritarian father and her 'Angel in the House' mother, Anju learns that

[22] Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Sister of My Heart* (New York: Anchor, 2000), *Vine of Desire* (New York: Anchor, 2003).

Sunil, her new husband, has fabricated his interest in Woolf to woo her. Anju finds that a feminist philosophy developed from reading Woolf is inadequate to help her and Sudha (her cousin) resolve the crises they encounter. If Western feminist narratives fail the characters, so do Indian mythological stories. Divakaruni's characters, Anju and Sudha, both emerge at the end with a different feminist philosophy. While Anju learns to temper her Western feminist readings with a reinterpretation of Indian mythical women, Sudha abandons the notion of ideal womanhood embedded in Indian myths and works toward autonomy. Both Divakaruni and her character Sudha create new narrative modes for the diasporic subject – modes that rework the magical elements of Indian mythology and help create for Dayita, Sudha's daughter, a different model of feminism than one developed solely from English feminist fiction. Divakaruni's narrative blends the stories of Sita and Draupadi with the lived realities of divorce and familial dysfunction to suggest that Indian myths of womanhood need to be reinvented to accommodate a contemporary reality. However, Sudha's story of Sita's trial by fire, conveyed in a dream to her infant daughter, Dayita, is a faithful retelling of the original. But at the end of the tale, where "Rama and Sita were happily reunited,"[23] Sudha inserts her question about happy endings parenthetically and presents the beginnings of an alternative world view to her daughter.

Not only does Divakaruni write with an awareness of Indian and English literary traditions, but she is also conscious of how South Asian Americans are a new ethnic group in the USA who are gaining visibility. In *Mistress of Spices*,[24] she writes a magical-realist novel that not only borrows from Indian mythology but also places her in relation to the postcolonial magical-realist tradition which includes such writers as Gabriel García Márquez, Ben Okri, and Salman Rushdie. Like Rushdie's Saleem, she sets out to write a history – that of Indian immigrants in the Bay area. Unlike Saleem, who takes on the grand narrative of Indian nationalism, she focusses on the small personal histories of Indian immigrants who come to Tilo's grocery store. Grocery stores have played a pivotal role in Indian immigrant culture in the USA (Jackson Heights in New York, Devon Avenue in Chicago, for instance). These stores often anchor the Indian businesses in the area and serve as a place where people meet and

[23] Divakaruni, *Vine of Desire*, 313.

[24] Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Mistress of Spices* (New York: Anchor, 1998).

connect to their communities while seeking products that sustain Indian cuisines. Indian grocery stores are also purveyors of culture through videos and CDs and can serve as advertisement centers for ethnic services, from beauty salons and baby sitting to catering and dance classes. In short, they become the point where commercial, personal, and community networks intersect. Like the "Delhi dekho" machine in *Midnight's Children*, Tilo's grocery store offers a montage of various elements in the lives of Indian immigrants, from the challenges of youth to discord between generations and the frustrations of the American dream deferred.

Tilo tries to heal her customers by offering them different spices, in whose magical properties she is trained. At first, Tilo's work is circumscribed by the Indian community and her store, but as the novel progresses, Tilo meets Raven, a Native American who is a shaman. The Tilo–Raven relationship becomes symbolic of many things: of the need for minority groups to come together in political action and also in romance; of the displacement of Native Americans and newer immigrants by dominant white culture and the diasporic status of each group; of the need for Indian immigrants to negotiate both their Indianness and their Americanness and not be imprisoned by either. Neither Tilo nor Raven forsakes his/her particular ethnic culture but learns to work within multiple linguistic and cultural registers. In this respect, Tilo is much like her creator, in that Divakaruni, too, works within multiple canons as she positions herself as a South Asian American writer.

South Asian American writers are not only engaged in reworking or rethinking canonical white American writers like Hawthorne and Rowlandson, but they are also in dialogue with ethnic American writers and Indian *bhasha* writers. Meena Alexander's essay "No Nation Woman," published in *The Shock of Arrival*, evokes the title of Maxine Hong Kingston's first chapter in *The Woman Warrior*, which is called "No Name Woman." Kingston's now canonical work focusses on the Chinese-American narrator's discovery of her roots, her past, through the story of her aunt, who had been erased from family history because she had had an adulterous relationship resulting in a baby after her husband had left her to find work in America. To the narrator, a young Chinese-American girl, this is a haunting narrative that starkly underscores a deeply entrenched patriarchy in China which she is spared because of her American location. Kingston's narrative renders the immigrant experience as a domestic, familial tragedy and does not delve into the conditions that lead to emigra-

tion and immigration, nor does it explore the global flow of labor and the impact of global capitalism on the individual.

Alexander's essay deliberately evokes Kingston's title to underscore the conditions of migration and role of global capitalism in rendering the immigrant woman homeless and rootless. She begins the essay by asking "How shall I make up my story?" Her story is not the stuff of epic, since she did not leave her homeland because of "terror or political repression." She left her homeland "quite simply because my father got a job he wanted to take, for a few years, far away in another country."[25] Her flight from patriarchy is neither deliberate nor accidental (like Kingston's), because she understands patriarchy as one of the fault lines of her being. She recognizes that she writes as a woman and not as a man prone to heroic tales: "as a woman, the best I can be is something small and stubborn, delicate perhaps at the best of times, but irrefutably persistent" (117). She sets herself apart from Kingston, in that hers is not a strident personal critique of patriarchy and racism and the double bind of the immigrant woman. Lest we try to read Alexander through the lens of Kingston, her essay reminds us that different Asian American writers experience immigration differently, and an overarching theory of Asian American literature will lead to skewed readings of particular texts.

Many of Alexander's works demonstrate her knowledge of different literary canons, from Romantic poetry and ethnic American literatures to Malayalam and anglophone Indian literature. In an essay on Sarojini Naidu in *Shock of Arrival,* Alexander ponders the question of language for Naidu, who was born of Bengali parents, grew up in Hyderabad, and spoke Urdu as her first language. She tells of how the nine-year-old Sarojini, who had refused to speak English to her parents, was locked in a dark room until she complied. Alexander writes that English became for Naidu the "language of both punishment and accomplishment" (175). Naidu, who was influenced by Arthur Symons and Ernest Dowson, seized their language and techniques to write poems that embodied a fierce nationalism and a potent feminism. Writers of Naidu's generation embraced this paradoxical relationship to English and modeled for Alexander how a writer might live and create in such a complex linguistic reality. Naidu becomes for Alexander a literary foremother. Speaking of her own history as

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[25] Meena Alexander, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (Boston MA: South End Press, 1996): 116. Further page references are in the main text.

a poet in "Language and Shame" (10–12), Alexander describes creative writing as a furtive and shameful experience for the child whose mother disapproved of her scribblings. Alexander notes that she never learned to read or write Malayalam, so that she is a "truly postcolonial creature" (11). She does regret the loss of intimacy with her mother tongue, acknowledging that loss to be the "price of fluency in many languages" (11). She warns, however, that an alternative to monolingualism may not be multilingualism, because it is difficult to gain intimacy in several languages. So, an uncritical embrace of multilingualism is simplistic and dangerous – "small and bloody wars have been fought for such ideals" (11).

Alexander is very knowledgeable about Malayalam literature, even though she neither reads nor writes it. She accesses Malayalam literature through translation and by having works read aloud to her. She writes of the impact that Lalithambika Anterjanam and Nalapat Balamaniamma have had on her. She writes of Antherjanam's protagonist in *Agnisakshi*, who breaks out of a *namboodiri illam* and who embraces many identities from social reformer to Gandhian politician and finally to ascetic.[26] Alexander writes that an image from *Agnisakshi* of the protagonist lying on the ground in Varanasi influences her ending in *Manhattan Music*. Instead of lying on the ground, Alexander's character Sandhya listens to a poor saxophonist playing in a New York park while she gazes at her reflection in a pond – an epiphany that opens up the possibility of hope for her. Alexander writes: "The world that Lalithambika Anterjanam wrote from is not far from me. I hear it within. It becomes part of the memory I need for knowledge of this new world, part of a migrant music" (192).

Language and the Indo-American writer

Alexander's understanding that writers like Anterjanam and Balamaniamma inform her cultural memory and shape her writing is an important one. Indo-American writers do not forsake their mother tongues, nor are they unread in *bhasha* writing. Most Indo-American writers are knowledgeable about British and American writing, literary works in their mother tongues, and also know major works in other Indian languages either through knowledge of the language or through translation. Alex-

[26] Lalithambika Antherjanam, *Agnisakshi*, tr. Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan (Tirchur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1980).

ander brings Indian language literature to the global literary world through her poems and essays. For example, in her most recent poetry collection, *Raw Silk*, where she writes of New York after 9/11 and ponders the global nature of violence, she calls upon the work of several other poets, from the Spaniard Federico García Lorca to the Indians Kabir and Wali Gujarati. In her poem “Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers,” she translates Kabir’s words in order to understand the horror of 9/11:

> Kabir the weaver sings:
>
> *O men and dogs*
> *in times of grief*
> *our rolling earth*
> *grows small* [27]

Kabir’s work is borne across time and space within her own poem; Alexander shows that poets can move across national and linguistic boundaries and that this move is mediated by other poets who are fluent in more than one language. In another poem in the same collection, she writes about how poetry enables her transnationalism: “hence poems I committed to memory, / flute music guiding me through the vertigo of history.”[28]

Conclusion

Although there is a significant loss of intimacy with culture for an individual who is unable to read or write in his/her native language, he/she can compensate for that loss through translation and orality and can gain much from a critical multilinguality. Such multilinguality undermines the hegemonic potential of any one language but does not assume that one is equally fluent in all languages. One acquires various degrees of intimacy and fluency with language and one can use such linguistic and cultural knowledge to inform one’s writing and interpretation. Because English is a heterogeneous global language in the twenty-first century and also because English has been domesticated, appropriated, and reworked by Indian authors in India and in many diasporic locations, it is as much a

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[27] Meena Alexander, *Raw Silk: Poems* (Evanston IL: TriQuarterly Books, 2004): 14.
[28] Alexander, *Raw Silk*, 35.

language of Indian reality as any of the Indian *bhashas* in their various native and diasporic forms.

The global presence of Indians and the many diasporic literatures that have emerged from the many Indian diasporas compel us to rethink what anglophone Indian writing is. Not only is English very much a part of the linguistic diversity of India but it is also the predominant language of literary expression in the diaspora. However, if we as critics were to conflate all Indian English literatures (native and diasporic) as one, we would be overlooking how each Indian diasporic community engages with multiple histories and literary canons. My brief analysis of South Asian American writing here perhaps offers a model for rethinking the definition of anglophone Indian literature and for reading diasporic writers' engagements with multiple canons.

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Not Too Spicy

Exotic Mistresses of Cultural Translation in the Fiction of Chitra Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri

LAVINA DHINGRA SHANKAR

> Languages are jealous sovereigns, and passports are rarely allowed for travellers to cross their strictly guarded boundaries.[1]

> For a writer of the South Asia diaspora, the habitations that language might provide – whatever the language, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarathi, English – are always conjured up, imaginary shelters that can only be piecemeal. The writer is haunted by the radical nature of dislocation, not singular, but multiple, given the world as it comes to us now [...].[2]

IN HIS 1912 INTRODUCTION to Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, W.B. Yeats praised the Bengali poet's work, which had "stirred [his] blood as nothing has for years," as the "work of a supreme culture."[3] Yet in 1935, in a letter to their common friend William Rothenstein, Yeats castigated the first Asian Nobel prizewinner for presumptuously writing in English instead of sticking to his native *Bangla-bhasha*:

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[1] Rabindranath Tagore, "Letter to Thomas Sturge Moore, 11 June 1935" [Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan]; quoted in Krishna Dutta & Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996): v.

[2] Meena Alexander, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (Boston MA: South End Press, 1996): 6–7.

[3] W.B. Yeats, "Introduction to *Gitanjali*" in Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (New York: Macmillan, 1914): vii, xiii.

> Damn Tagore. We got out three good books, Sturge Moore and I, and then, because he thought it more important to see and know English than to be a great poet, he brought out sentimental rubbish and wrecked his reputation. Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English. Nobody can write with music and style in a language not learned in childhood and ever since the language of his thought.[4]

The questions of whether any Indian-born writer can ever know English, or create "good" literature in the colonial tongue, or if the native language of childhood alone defines authorial identity, and whether writers can ever adequately translate between different cultures to satisfy multiple linguistic audiences – what this volume refers to as the language debates surrounding Indian English and "Other Tongues" – have thus been rampant for at least a century.[5] Despite Yeats's vociferous and condescending reprimand of Tagore, he did include seven poems by Tagore in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936). Sixty years later, Salman Rushdie would have vehemently disagreed with Yeats, claiming as he does that the *only* Indian literature worth reading is in English, and he denounces Indian critics who view the English language as "the bastard child of Empire, sired on India by the departing British."[6] Rather absurdly, Rushdie situates only one vernacular Indian writer in translation as "on a par with the Indo-Anglian" – Saadat Hasan Manto. Even Tagore could not meet Rushdie's standards.[7]

This essay raises questions such as: who writes for whom, in what genres, and which languages? How do writers translate 'native cultures' for their varied audiences – whether domestic or global? How and why do

[4] W.B. Yeats, "Damn Tagore" (7 May [sic] 1935), in *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (New York: Macmillan, 1955): 834–35; quoted in Krishna Dutta & Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*, 4.

[5] See especially Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), for the role of English literary studies in India.

[6] Salman Rushdie, "Damme, This Is the Oriental Scene for You!" *New Yorker* (23 June 1997): 52.

[7] Ironically, in a British parliamentary debate, Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn stated that English was "not only the language of Shakespeare and the Romantic poets, but also the language of James Joyce, Rabindranath Tagore and of Hemingway, and many African writers today" (*Hansard*, 24 March 1993, 407); quoted in Dutta & Robinson: 6, 381.

writers claim specific readers? How do authors' locational history and language choices affect their audience, their popularity with non-native reading groups, and, ultimately, their inclusion in academic literary canons? I will not debate whether English is an Indian language,[8] or whether writing in English versus what this volume terms *bhasha* (vernacular) languages is more authentic to the native, the immigrant, or the transnational diasporic experience. Instead, I shall contextualize South Asian American women's writing within the contemporary North American context and the constantly evolving Asian American immigrant canon. Specifically, I examine how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri negotiate among multiple audiences. I argue that authors' identity, language choices, and their translations and mediations between cultures directly affects their audience and canonization. While Divakaruni seems to easily appeal to mainstream Euro-American feminist audiences, Lahiri operates as a cultural translator herself, mediating between multiple audiences. Thus they offer a sharp contrast to the poet and memoirist Meena Alexander, who does not fit easily into the expectations of any nation-bound readership – whether Indian, American, British, or African – but, rather, weaves her way in and out of numerous transnational and linguistic diasporas.[9]

In *Imagining the Nation* (1998), David Leiwei Li asks repeatedly, with regard to Asian American texts, "who reads them for whom under what circumstances and with what purposes in mind." He poses similar pointed

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[8] For interesting insights on these issues, see Amit Chaudhuri's "Modernity and the Vernacular," his Introduction to *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (London: Picador/Pan Macmillan, 2002), where he asks, in rebuttal to Rushdie: "Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party, most of whom have published no more than two novels, some of them only one?" (xvii). Seemingly vaguely, yet rather accurately, he claims that "English is not an Indian language in the way it is an American language; nor is it an Indian language in the way that Bengali or Urdu, for instance, is one" (xxii).

[9] See Lavina D. Shankar, "'No Nation Woman' Writes Herself: War and the Return Home in Meena Alexander's Memoirs," in *Ethnic Life-Writing and Histories*, ed. Rocío G. Davis, Jaume Aurell & Ana Beatriz Delgado (Münster: LIT, 2007): 76–96; "Postcolonial Diasporics 'Writing in Search of a Homeland': Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music, Fault Lines,* and *Shock of Arrival,*" *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 12.3 (September 2001): 285–312.

questions about writing: "for whom does the Asian American author write, and in what social and institutional contexts?" He argues that the "arrival of an 'Asian American renaissance'" is connected with the "coming of age" of an "ethnic 'professional-managerial class'."[10]

South Asian American women's literary renaissance and their claiming of global audiences is directly connected with their privileged class positions, their use of the colonial English language, and their American immigration history. Their reading audience thus differs significantly from earlier Chinese- and Japanese-American writers, who, even when American-born, were usually raised in working-class families and were thus at least second- or third-generation Americans before they could acquire the educational background, the facility in English, and the economic freedom of choice of profession necessary for a writing career.[11] The upper- and middle-class South Asian immigrant women, by contrast, published their literary works almost immediately after arrival in North America since 1965, thanks to their (post)colonial British-style secondary and higher education, their fluency in the English language, and their academic training in the Leavisian literary "Great Tradition." In fact, Anita Desai, Meena Alexander, and Bapsi Sidhwa were already widely published authors *in English*, in India or Pakistan, before emigrating to the USA.

South Asian American writers thus appealed to mainstream American audiences even before their emigration in large numbers.[12] They have gained critical attention and prestigious prizes *because* they write in English and have easily claimed American audiences. For instance, Jhumpa Lahiri is the first Indian American to win the Pulitzer, a quintessentially American prize, in the wake of such writers as John Steinbeck, Ernest

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[10] David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1998): 16.

[11] As Elaine Kim points out, early Asian immigrant workers did not leave written accounts of individual lives as they were struggling for a livelihood, and Carlos Bulosan documented the lives of Filipino farm workers only when he was undergoing mandatory rest to recuperate from tuberculosis. *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia PA: Temple UP, 1982): 23.

[12] For the history of South Asians in the USA and their marginal position within the Asian American canon, see Lavina D. Shankar & Rajini Srikanth, *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America* (Philadelphia PA: Temple UP, 1998). Especially, see Lavina D. Shankar, "The Limits of (South Asian) Names and Labels: Postcolonial or Asian American?" in Shankar & Srikanth: 49–66.

Hemingway, Saul Bellow, William Faulkner, and John Updike. Chitra Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage* received the 1996 American Book Award, the Josephine Miles Award, the Bay Area Book Reviewers and the PEN Oakland Awards for fiction. Ved Mehta, who emigrated to the USA in the 1950s, has published over twenty books, and been identified for decades with the mainstream American literary establishment – the *New Yorker*. Not surprisingly, it was the *New Yorker* that, in 1997, brought Indian writing in English into the American limelight with a special issue celebrating the 50th anniversary of Indian Independence. The American (and global) audience would have been much more limited had the same contributors and articles appeared in ethnic American publications such as *Amerasia*, the *Journal of Asian American Studies*, the *South Asian Review*, or *MELUS*, the journal of the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the USA. The *New Yorker*'s imprimatur, ironically, gave birth to and nurtured the global audience and late-twentieth-century worldwide reception of Indian literature in English. What multiple volumes of encyclopedias, including *South Asian Novelists in English: An A–Z Guide* or *South Asian Literature in English: An Encyclopedia*,[13] cannot achieve was done by one slim magazine.

I suggest that the South Asian American authors' success is thus often directly tied to how accessible their work is to 'non-native' audiences, and how difficult or easy the writer makes the work of cultural translation for her readers. For instance, Lahiri's Pulitzer prize-winning short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, has different titles and book covers in its varied national reincarnations. The American edition is marketed as stories from India, and displays an exotic cover with *mehndi*-style Eastern designs; the Indian edition is explicitly subtitled "Stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond,"[14] and portrays the confused-looking face of a young woman ambiguously marked as either South Asian or South Asian American. Similarly, Bapsi Sidhwa's masterpiece about Partition is published in India and England as *Ice-Candy Man*. However, to prevent misinterpretations regarding drugs, in the USA, it is sold as *Cracking India*, a title that

[13] See Jaina C. Sanga's edited volumes, *South Asian Novelists in English: An A–Z Guide* (Westport CT: Greenwood, 2003); *South Asian Literature in English: An Encyclopedia* (Westport CT: Greenwood, 2004).

[14] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies: Stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond* (India: HarperCollins, 2000).

seems to trivialize Partition, and insinuates that the subcontinent is an exotic, mysterious puzzle to be cracked open.[15] Such publication choices target specific audiences, and help create markets, which eventually influence what gets read, reviewed, taught, researched, and included in pedagogical and scholarly canons, whether Indian, postcolonial, Asian American, or diasporic.

South Asian American women's claiming of American audiences differs significantly from that by earlier Asian American writers such as Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa, Hisaye Yamamoto, or Carlos Bulosan, many of whom focussed on making visible to a largely European American public the unseen worlds of laundries, restaurants, Chinatowns, Japanese-American internment camps, and Filipino field-workers' lives. By contrast, South Asian women have depicted upper-middle-class characters' physical, emotional, and psychological journeys of displacement (and assimilation) from the originary homeland to the imagined Promised Land; their escape from social pressures of gender-inscribed limitations of marriage, sexuality, motherhood, and so on; or the amelioration of their material conditions by attaining economic independence. These works depict the female protagonists escaping oppressive homes and homelands. Hence, the Asian families (both parental and in-laws) and social structures are often viewed as agents of repression. North America, conversely, is represented as the land of opportunity and liberty, and its anonymity and the freedom from extended families helps the female protagonists to build new lives, personalities, and identities. Prominent examples include Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975), *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), and *Jasmine* (1989); Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993); and Chitra Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage* (1995), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), and *The Vine of Desire* (2002).

Unfortunately, however, these writers often exoticized South Asia and simplistically attempted to appeal to mid-1970s and '80s mainstream white liberal feminisms.[16] In many of her works, Chitra Banerjee Diva-

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[15] Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (Minneapolis MI: Milkweed, 1991). *Ice-Candy Man* (London: Heinemann, 1991).

[16] See Lavina D. Shankar, "Activism, 'Feminisms,' and Americanization in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* and *Jasmine*." *Hitting Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 3.1 (Fall 1995): 61–84.

karuni depicts the stereotypical oppressiveness of arranged marriages,[17] patriarchal and often abusive Indian (or Indian American) husbands, either silent ciphers or dominating witches as mothers-in-law, and flat, cardboard-cutout, white male 'savior'-figure lovers who liberate the repressed Asian women's sexualities. Although the female protagonists' laying down roots in America entails jettisoning the cultural baggage from their Asian pasts, including their unsuccessful marriages, the writer's commercial success seems to be based on claiming American feminist audiences by perpetuating stereotypical, mainstream views of a backward, Third-World Asia and a progressive, individualistic First-World America.

"The Amy Tan Phenomenon"?

Writers such as Chitra Divakaruni often seem to fall prey to what Sau-ling C. Wong – with respect to Chinese American writers – terms the "Amy Tan phenomenon." These writers satisfy majority audiences that, in turn, contribute to their commercial success: "'mainstream' feminist writing; Asian American matrilineal literature; quasi ethnography about the Orient; Chinese American 'tour-guiding' works; [...] multiculturalist rhetoric."[18] Vijay Prashad describes the phenomenon as early as the nineteenth century, when the Indian female doctor Pandita Ramabai's book *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1888) "fed the exaggerated notions of the bondage of pitiful Indian women at the hands of brutish Indian men."[19]

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[17] For a sociological perspective, see *Emerging Voices: South Asian American Women Redefine Self, Family, and Community*, ed. Sangeeta R. Gupta (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 1999). Divakaruni's experiences as the co-founder and President of an abused women's shelter *Maitri* has probably influenced her fiction. Also see *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America*, ed. Shamita Das Dasgupta (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 1998).

[18] Sau-ling C. Wong, "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon," in *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, Interventions*, ed. David Palumbo–Liu (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1995): 202. For an important review of the debates between Western and "third world" feminisms, see Harveen Sachdeva Mann, "Women's Rights versus Feminism? Postcolonial Perspectives," in *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts*, ed. Gita Rajan & Radhika Mohanram (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1995): 69–88.

[19] Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000): 26.

Like Bharati Mukherjee's writing, her protégée Chitra Divakaruni's early fiction also simplifies the binaries of a repressive, patriarchal India, and a liberatory space that is provided by the American geography and the promise of the 'American dream'. The stories in *Arranged Marriage*, which are set both in India and in the USA, deal with a wide range of issues of interest to most (Asian) American feminists, including domestic violence ("The Bats"), mother–daughter co-dependency ("The Word Love"), and the obstacles facing interracial sexual relations ("The Word Love," "A Perfect Life").[20] Her fiction caters easily to a mainstream feminist audience interested in learning about yet patronizing 'oppressed' non-Western women. Although she does not specifically refer to literature, Chandra Talpade Mohanty names such a problem explicitly:

> By contrasting the representation of women in the third world with [...] Western feminisms' self-presentation in the same context, we see how Western feminists alone become the true 'subjects' of this counter-history. Third world women, on the other hand, never rise above the debilitating generality of their 'object' status.[21]

Although Divakaruni does not portray Western feminists as the only subjects with agency and power, her texts lend themselves readily to co-optation by stereotypical Western, feminist perceptions and ways of seeing. Even the titles of Divakaruni's texts problematically 'fit' into voyeuristic Western feminist paradigms of 'Oriental' women who are yoked into 'arranged marriages' and are the exotic "mistresses of spices" and the fantasy-ridden "Queen of Dreams."[22]

Throughout Divakaruni's early fiction, then, India is unidimensionally portrayed as a negative, oppressive hell-hole, while America allows

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[20] As Peter van der Veer points out in his introduction to *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995): 14, "The Asian woman has long been the sign of the backwardness of Asian cultures in the orientalist imagination. The narrative of her subjection and lack of freedom has in the Indian case especially focused on arranged marriages with bridewealth, or dowry."

[21] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991): 71.

[22] Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Arranged Marriage* (New York: Anchor, 1995); *The Mistress of Spices* (New York: Doubleday, 1997); *Queen of Dreams* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

women, including Jayanti (from "Silver Pavements") and Sumita (from "Clothes"), to escape the shackles of family, tradition, and superstition, and to create their own destinies. Thus, in "Clothes," even after her husband is murdered in their convenience store, the young widow Sumita Sen decides that she will remain in America, as returning to India feels like drowning,

> That is when I know I cannot go back. I don't know yet how I'll manage, here in this new, dangerous land. I only know I must. Because all over India, at this very moment, widows in white saris are bowing their veiled heads, serving tea to in-laws. Doves with cut-off wings. [...]. The neon Budweiser emblem winking on and off like a risky invitation.[23]

While America is stereotypically urban, swathed in neon-lit billboards signaling risk, sexuality, and freedom, India is portrayed as eternal, mystical, and mysterious, and symbolized by its ancient Hindu religiosity and spicy cuisine. Hence, in Divakaruni's American fable *The Mistress of Spices*, the protagonist finds her vocation as a spiritual and psychological healer of American and immigrant ailments, selling exotic Indian spices including "Turmeric," "Fenugreek," "Asafetida," "Fennel," "Neem." A weak experiment in magical realism,[24] the novel combines Hindu myths, fables, and superstitions with critiques of contemporary American social problems including racial tension, ethnic identity conflicts, assimilation, teenage drugs and gangs, forbidden intercultural romances, abusive or broken marriages, and spiritual emptiness among materially affluent but emotionally poor Indian immigrants.

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[23] Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, "Clothes," in *Arranged Marriage* (New York: Anchor, 1995): 33.

[24] My reading here differs from that of Debjani Banerjee, who sees this novel as employing "a more complex strategy" (22) and "a more mature structural configuration in order to discuss the diaspora" (26) than the short stories. I agree with her criticism of Divakaruni's books' "exotic" "bright and ethnic covers, complete with a picture of the author – the beautiful Oriental woman" (28). See Debjani Banerjee, "'Home and Us': Re-Defining Identity in the South Asian Diaspora Through the Writings of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Meena Alexander," in *Asian-American Writing: The Diasporic Imagination*, vol. 2, ed. Somdatta Mandal (New Delhi: Prestige: 2000): 9–43.

Without providing any deep understanding or knowledge about the vast intellectual realms of ancient or modern Indian religions or philosophy, Divakaruni helps cater to simplistic mainstream American stereotypes about the Hindu physical and spiritual healer, 'yogi' or 'guru' figure à la Deepak Chopra. As she ministers to people's ailments, "the mistress" falls in love with a handsome, part-Native American customer, Raven, or "My American." The Indian immigrant reincarnates as Maya, and her American lover both names and clothes her to shed her traditional self: "Even my name takes on new texture in his mouth, the vowels shorter and sharper, the consonants more defined. My American, in all ways you are reshaping me," she purrs contentedly.[25] As the protagonist hungrily welcomes her own journey to becoming American, the author seems to claim an American reading audience for whom Indian culture becomes easily digestible – intriguingly spicy, yet not too hot.

Similarly, Divakaruni's second novel, *Sister of My Heart*, perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes regarding India, while appealing to feminist audiences interested in themes of female bonding and sisterhood.[26] It is a highly sentimentalized romance about two Bengali cousins who desert their pregnant wives to seek wild adventures and lost rubies in Forsterian and Kiplingesque caves and jungles. The young widows raise their daughters Anju and Sudha in a matriarchal, all-female household à la Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. The plot, however, twists and turns like an implausible, overly melodramatic soap-opera-like Hindi film. Entirely unconscious of the inherent ironies, Divakaruni seems to borrow from the genre of Bollywood films to provide an exotic multicultural spectacle for her Western female audience.[27] Sudha sacrifices her lover Ashok, and accepts bondage in an oppressive traditional arranged marriage with Ramesh. This martyr-like action safeguards against parental emotional blackmail regarding Anju's arranged marriage with a wealthy American immigrant, Sunil, which risks being broken by scandal if Sudha's secret

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[25] Chitra Divakaruni, *Mistress of Spices* (New York: Doubleday, 1997): 205.

[26] For an interesting analysis of Divakaruni's investment in this theme, see Urbashi Barat, "Sisters of the Heart: Female Bonding in the Fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni," in *Asian-American Writing*, vol. 2, ed. Somdatta Mandal, 44–60.

[27] On the relationship between Hollywood and the Bombay film industry (Bollywood), see Rachel Dwyer, *All You Want is Money, All You Need is Love* (London: Cassell, 2000): 96–147. Netflix and several satellite TV channels have brought these soap opera like movies filled with song and dance to an American audience.

romance (with Ashok) is discovered. Anju's jealousy, secrets, and lies, arising from her husband's entrancement with her cousin (as he steals and kisses Sudha's handkerchief) on his wedding night, nearly wrecks the sisters' intensely close emotional relationship. Sudha's mother-in-law tortures her for her alleged infertility and then tries to abort her female fetus; finally, Anju has a miscarriage as she overworks in her secret job to help the divorced Sudha and her fatherless baby to move to America.

The novel thus sharply contrasts the moribund and stifling Indian world of aborted romance, forced arranged marriages, religious superstitions, female feticides, and jailor-like matriarchs with an absolute, unlimited freedom in dream-like America. After their hastily arranged marriage, the Californian Sunil transmits to Anju the fairy-tale promise of his magical country and its gift of self-creation: "When he describes America to me, it seems almost as amazing as the fairy kingdoms of Pishi's tales. 'You can be anything in America, Angel' – [...] he says excitedly. 'You can be what you want'."[28] Anju's American dream exhibits choices that Divakaruni depicts as not viable for Anju in Calcutta. Unlike sexism-ridden, repressive India, America allows her the treasured intellectual freedom to attend college, and provides a secret opportunity for financial freedom:

> I love working. No [...] .What I really love is earning *my own* money. What a feeling of *power* it gives me to take *my own* check to the bank and put it into *my own* account! [...] breathing in that green scent, the scent of *freedom* [...].[29]

The conflation of individual ownership, power, and freedom (all identified with America) is explicit in Anju's refrain "my own" – a trait not allowed to women in Divakaruni's India, who are themselves objects being owned, rather than possessors of income or wealth.

Divakaruni's narrator also praises the "advantage of anonymity"[30] and freedom that America allows to women who choose to live without men,

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[28] Divakaruni, *Sister of My Heart*, 161. For a relevant analysis of Divakaruni's representation of the intersection of class, race, and freedom, especially in her story "A Perfect Life," see Sau-ling C. Wong, "Middle-Class Asian American Women in a Global Frame: Refiguring the Statue of Liberty in Divakaruni and Minatoya" *MELUS* 29.3–4 (Fall–Winter 2004): 183–210.

[29] Divakaruni, *Sister of My Heart*, 265; emphasis added.

[30] *Sister of My Heart*, 272.

unlike conservative Bengali society. After the pregnant Sudha, influenced by Anju's "American-feminist notions of right and wrong,"[31] leaves her husband and her mother-in-law's oppressive home, Anju invites her to move to the USA, since life as a single mother would be easier for Sudha in California, without fear of social disapproval of divorce:

> No one in America would care that I was a daughter of the Chatterjees, or that I was divorced. I could design a new life, earn my own living, give Dayita everything she needed. Best of all, no one would look down on her, for America was full of mothers like me who'd decided that living alone was better than living with the wrong man.[32]

Although she doesn't explicitly distinguish between the two locations, in Divakaruni's American feminist influenced views living alone in America is unquestionably preferable to living in India with the wrong man.

Divakaruni's appeal to mainstream female audiences interested in Harlequin or Mills & Boon-type romances with an exotic locale and characters begs the question about what is at stake in terms of aesthetic compromises when an immigrant writer is marketed to mainstream audiences. For instance, Divakaruni's novel *The Vine of Desire* (2002), which continues the sensationalistic adulterous affair between Sudha and Anju's husband in the USA in *Sister of My Heart*, was featured as the "Valentine's Special" at the entrance of the Borders bookstore in Portland, Maine, in February 2002, and prominently displayed with new fiction at the Auburn (Maine) Public Library. It is safe to say that the novel, in both these cases, was not aimed at the very limited South Asian American audience in Maine.

I am definitely not arguing against the ethnic inauthenticity of Divakaruni's immigrant writing or of her aesthetic sensibilities; her intimacy with Bengali foods, cooking, and folk legends, is, in fact, one of the strengths of her fiction, and creates what Mitali Wong and Zia Hasan term "a poetic sub-text"[33] in *Sister of My Heart*. Nor am I implying that

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[31] Divakaruni, *Sister of My Heart*, 250.

[32] *Sister of My Heart*, 272.

[33] Mitali P. Wong & Zia Hasan, *The Fiction of South Asians in North America and the Caribbean: A Critical Study of English-Language Works Since 1950* (Jefferson NC & London: McFarland, 2004): 68. They commend Divakaruni for her "selective

claiming American audiences is *per se* a flawed choice, or that ethnic female writers should not depict negative images of native patriarchal societies or oppressive immigrant males. Or that to conform to standards of ethnic loyalty, they should refrain from presenting the competing oppressions of gender and race, as witnessed in the debates surrounding Alice Walker vs. Ishmael Reed, or Maxine Hong Kingston vs. Frank Chin.[34] Similarly, I believe that Mary Dearborn's argument in *Pocahontas's Daughters* regarding the dilemma of the ethnic female artist is valid. It thus carries what Patricia P. Chu considers the "special burden" of "being damned for success itself."[35] According to Dearborn, "The ethnic woman who mediates too successfully, who writes for the perspective of the dominant culture (which has insisted on her Americanization and conversion to its values) rather than that of [a reviewer's idea of] 'her own' culture, is roundly scolded."[36]

Ironically, it is the popular writers such as Divakaruni (and Mukherjee) who also often get "scolded," as their works are more frequently reviewed by members of the ethnic group and readily digestible to larger audiences, who then perceive them as ethnic representatives. I certainly do not think that a reviewer's or critic's view of an imagined 'authentic' ethnicity, or a naive essentialism, warrants rebuking an ethnic writer. What is objectionable, in my view, is that a limited, negative view of women's lives in South Asia seems to be perpetuated and unidimensionally over-represented in the American context.[37]

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use of Indian loan words" which "reinforces Tilo's South Asian voice" in *Mistress of Spices*.

[34] See Elaine Kim's discussion in *Asian American Literature*, especially the chapter "Chinatown Cowboys and Warrior Women," 173–213.

[35] Patricia P. Chu, *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 2000): 94.

[36] Mary V. Dearborn, *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986): 41; quoted in Patricia P. Chu, *Assimilating Asians*, 94.

[37] For more varied, multi-layered perspectives, see, among others, the collection *Feminism in India*, ed. Maitrayee Chaudhuri (Delhi: Kali for Women, 2004), and *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, ed. Susie Tharu & K. Lalita, 2 vols. (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1991).

'Know thy neighbors': translating for varied audiences

Unlike Chitra Divakaruni, who seems to appeal simplistically to mainstream feminist audiences by dishing up an exotic and easily digestible India – oppressive, patriarchal, yet spicy and mystical – Jhumpa Lahiri seems to claim multiple audiences by using what Linda Hutcheon, in another context, terms the insider's "double-voiced irony" – which "exploits its 'insider' position in order to begin a subversion from within."[38] In one sense, Jhumpa Lahiri's claiming of American audiences is more obvious than her predecessors, as her point of reference is American, rather than Asian, and reveals her choice of America and Americans in subject matter, location, characterization, and narrative perspective. Thus it is no surprise that her short-story collection *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) was a Pulitzer prize-winner and a New York Times bestseller; the title story was first published in the *New Yorker* and received the O. Henry Award and the Best American Short Stories Award.

Not surprisingly, Lahiri has described herself as a translator between cultures. Having immigrated to the USA at the age of one, unlike earlier South Asian American women writers, Lahiri usually portrays second-generation *American* concerns and the highly educated, professional, affluent, Bengali immigrant community's interactions with their Euro-American colleagues, employers, lovers, neighbors, and landladies, in the Boston–Cambridge area through the 1970s and 80s.[39] Yet the author claims that her parents were surprised she won a prize for American citizens dealing with "American life," since in her mother's eyes she is "first and forever Indian. Furthermore, my book, in her opinion, wasn't about American life. It was about people like herself and myself – Indians. I suppose I should be grateful that my mother wasn't on the Pulitzer committee."[40] As she states explicitly, "And whether I write as an American

[38] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989): 114.

[39] As Jhumpa Lahiri has stated, as a child she felt "an intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved on either side of the hyphen" but she "felt neither Indian nor American." Jhumpa Lahiri, "My Two Lives," *Newsweek* (6 March 2006): http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11569225/site/newsweek (accessed 19 February 2007).

[40] Jhumpa Lahiri, "To Heaven Without Dying," *Feed* (24 July 2000): http://www.feedmag.com/book2/essay_lahiri.html

or an Indian, about things American or Indian or otherwise, one thing remains constant: I translate, therefore I am."[41]

Lahiri's characters and narrators operate like cultural translators, and the mainstream American (or Asian American) reader's ignorance regarding South Asia is readily sanctioned and forgiven. She seems to exhibit a narrative/authorial desire to educate mainstream Americans about the Bengali immigrants, without resorting to explicit criticism. The narrators (or characters) gloss historical facts (such as the 1947 Partition and the 1971 Pakistan–Bangladesh war in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"), and cultural specifics regarding food, and social and religious customs of Bengalis, that the author explicitly does not expect her American audience to know about. Although not so blatantly as Jade Snow Wong or Amy Tan, occasionally in stories like "Mrs. Sen," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," and "A Temporary Matter," Lahiri performs the role of what Elaine Kim criticizes Wong for being – "an anthropologist's key informant: rice-washing, shopping for Chinese groceries, cooking Chinese food [...] elaborated in meticulous detail."[42] Throughout, Lahiri's narrator does not resort to harsh satire, like Shani Mootoo's, or intellectualized introspective self-pity like Meena Alexander's.[43] Instead, Lahiri's irony is very gentle, never bitter or trenchant; the point of view always compassionate. Even though Lahiri's work is not addressed solely to Euro-American readers, and she is not writing of internment camps, Elaine Kim's description of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's intention in *Farewell to Manzanar* to prevent her book from becoming "guilt-producing or self-pitying" might apply to Lahiri's approach to her American audience, too.[44]

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[41] Jhumpa Lahiri, quoted in Harish Trivedi, "Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation," *Journal of the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies* 2 (Autumn 2004): 42.

[42] Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature*, 67.

[43] See my "Multiple Hyphenations and Inauthentic Diasporic Subjectivities in Shani Mootoo's *Out on Main Street*," under review. Also, for similar views on Alexander, see my "Postcolonial Diasporics."

[44] Kim cites Houston's remarks from a telephone conversation, about her hopes of educating "middle class Americans" about Asian America: "We have to educate them, we have to get our foot in the door. We aren't the ones needing education about Asian Americans; middle class America needs to learn." Hence, the Houstons prevented the book from becoming "guilt-producing or self-pitying" because "we can't afford to get the whites uptight. [...] [W]e didn't want to turn them off" (quoted in Kim, *Asian American Literature*, 84).

Like Houston, who wishes to reach "middle-class America," Lahiri is careful not to criticize populations that constitute her audience; hence the stories are not just about Bengali immigrants but about a nation of American immigrants. Thus *Interpreter* is among the few South Asian American texts that depict several Euro-American characters who are not merely flat, marginal prototypes, but are well-rounded. She sensitively depicts the subtle emotional exchanges and relationships among Euro-American and Bengali-American characters of varying ages and genders. Most 'Americans' in Lahiri's fiction are constructed as sympathetic characters – helpful, kind, non-prejudiced, sensitive, and caring individuals. Yet the level of relationships among the South Asians and other Americans is superficial and does not indicate much choice – colleagues sharing office gossip, baby-sitters, and landladies. There are no deep friendships, long-term relationships, shared spiritual or religious activities, or inter-cultural marriages.

Lahiri's cultural translation among multiple audiences is seen through her mild criticism, in more than one story, of American characters' geographical, historical, and cultural ignorance. In the title story "Interpreter of Maladies," Lahiri depicts the cultural mistranslations between the young Bengali-American family – which "looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did" – and their multilingual Indian tour guide, Mr. Kapasi, who works as a medical translator for Gujarati-speaking patients, yet cannot communicate with his own wife.[45] In this story, which is among the few set in India, Lahiri mildly satirizes the culturally insensitive American-born Mr and Mrs Das traipsing India with their Fodor's-style guidebooks, viewing erotic temple art, and voyeuristically snapping photographs of the stereotypical rural poor; their egalitarianism is depicted as weak child-rearing, and Mina's sexual freedom leads to infidelity and an illegitimate child within a dysfunctional romantic marriage. The story

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[45] Jhumpa Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies," in *Interpreter of Maladies,* 43–69. For a positive reading of the Indian Mr. Kapasi's character as more admirable than the American Das's, see Bonnie Zare, "Evolving Masculinities in Recent Stories by South Asian American Women," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 42 (2007): 99–111. By contrast, Sheetal Majithia views him as "fixed and static," in "Of Foreigners and Fetishes: A Reading of Recent South Asian American Fiction," *SAMAR: South Asian Magazine of Action and Reflection* 14 (Fall–Winter 2001): 5, online: http://www.samarmagazine.org/archive/article.php?id=59

ends with multiple misinterpretations among all the characters and mixed messages that are lost in cultural translation.

Unlike the title story, where the Indian Americans are viewed as culturally ignorant, in "Sexy" Lahiri depicts a twenty-two-year-old, single Midwesterner, Miranda, who has never traveled farther than the Bahamas, and has an affair with a Bengali investment banker, Devajit Mitra, while his wife is visiting India. From the outset, the insulated young woman begins quite literally to learn about the world from her wealthy, educated, immigrant lover: "Dev was Bengali, too. At first Miranda thought it was a religion. But then he pointed it out to her, a place in India called Bengal, in a map printed in an issue of *The Economist* [...] she did not own an atlas, or any other books with maps in them."[46] After first evoking the reader's sympathy for the innocent, naive, and lonely young woman, who loves the older married foreigner passionately, tenderly, and rather touchingly,[47] Lahiri gradually exposes Miranda's xenophobic and racist upbringing by delving into the protagonist's childhood memories of the only other Indian-Americans she had known. Her neighbors, the Dixits, had been the objects of ridicule by the nine-year-old Miranda and her friends, as their fathers criticized the immigrants for not raking or fertilizing their lawn properly, their mothers wouldn't invite them to the children's birthday parties, and the neighborhood kids, including Miranda, taunted and joked meanly that "'The Dixits dig shit.'"[48] Without blaming the prejudiced 'American' characters for their cruel behavior, however, Lahiri utilizes the child's narrative point of view to expose their past misdemeanors – Miranda, who, as a child, is bigoted and afraid of the alien Other, is culturally and sexually attracted as an adult to the exotic Other.

A true translator and interpreter of others' maladies, like the protagonist of the book's title story, Lahiri doesn't limit herself to Euro-American audiences, but speaks to South Asian Americans, too. Simultaneously, Lahiri reveals to South Asian immigrant readers how they might be perceived from an American child's point of view. Lahiri's non-judgmental

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[46] Jhumpa Lahiri, "Sexy," in *Interpreter of Maladies*, 84.

[47] I disagree with Eva Tettenborn's oversimplification, in "Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*: Colonial Fantasies in 'Sexy'," that the story is "a cautionary tale about colonial romantic fantasies," or that Miranda treats Dev as the "sexually insatiable man of color"; *Notes on Contemporary Literature* 32.4 (2002): 11–12.

[48] Jhumpa Lahiri, "Sexy," in *Interpreter of Maladies*, 95.

narrator describes Miranda's discomfort as a child when invited to "the Dixit girl's" birthday party:

> Miranda remembered a heavy aroma of incense and onions in the house, and a pile of shoes heaped by the front door. But most of all she remembered [...] a painting of a naked woman with a red face shaped like a knight's shield. [...] Around her body was a necklace composed of bleeding heads, strung together like a popcorn chain. She stuck her tongue out at Miranda.
>
> "It is the goddess Kali," Mrs. Dixit explained brightly [...]. Miranda, then nine years old, had been too frightened to eat the cake. For months afterward she'd been too frightened even to walk on the same side of the street as the Dixits' house [...] she even held her breath [...] just as she did when the school bus passed a cemetery.[49]

Thus, Lahiri's restrained narrator diplomatically translates an 'American' child's internalized and socialized fear of the strange, the alien, the repulsive, barbaric, hence demonized 'Other'. Here, the goddess Kali is not the object of veneration and female power as in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* but, rather, the demonic figure associated with death and cemeteries.

Self-consciously writing to and translating other tongues and cultures for multiple audiences, Lahiri enlists identification (and either regret or self-exoneration) among (Caucasian or other non-South Asian) readers who might have indulged in a similar rejection of the barbaric Other. Simultaneously, among immigrant readers who identify with the Dixits, she evokes empathy for the terrified nine-year-old 'native' American who unwittingly distances herself from her strange, foreign neighbors because of their alien/ating customs. In a reworking of the fairy-tale "Hansel and Gretel" (or could it be Shakespeare's *Tempest*?), the child Miranda is fearful both of consuming food offered by the Other, and of being consumed by the Other, here by the witch-like demonic (cannibalist?) Hindu goddess Kali, represented in excruciating detail, with blood dripping from her tongue and a garland of severed heads hanging on her breasts. Ironically, the adult Miranda is embarrassed and feels guilty about her past fears and prejudices. So she moves to the other extreme and now romanticizes the Other as exotic and desirable:

[49] Jhumpa Lahiri, "Sexy," 95–96.

> It shamed her now. Now, when she and Dev made love, Miranda closed her eyes and saw deserts and elephants, and marble pavillions floating on lakes beneath a full moon. One Saturday, having nothing else to do, she walked all the way to Central Square, to an Indian restaurant, and ordered a plate of tandoori chicken. As she ate she tried to memorize phrases printed at the bottom of the menu, for things like "delicious" and "water" and "check, please."[50]

Lahiri thus skillfully juxtaposes the stereotypical touristy images of an exotic India – the India of Taj Mahal and the Udaipur Lake palaces that have always attracted Western travelers and that a few decades earlier Anita Desai satirized as "eternal India"[51] – with the primitive, savage India of multiple Hindu gods and blind faith that the British colonizers wished to tame. Yet she seems to forgive the child narrator for her xenophobia, since it is transformed into the adult's attraction to the Other. The adult Bostonian Miranda desires to ingest both Indian food and language. Ironically, of course, the 'Indian' food in most Cambridge restaurants is presumably Mughlai or Punjabi and not Bengali, and the phrases on the menu are in Urdu or Hindi – but such subtle distinctions would be lost in the translation anyway. Perhaps both the food and the languages that Miranda acquires a tongue for – as she contemplates trying the "Very spicy," "Too spicy for you" "Hot Mix" snack at the Indian grocery store[52] and buys "Teach Yourself" Bengali books – symbolize her exotic lover. Thus, Miranda offers a contrast to the unnamed Indo-Trinidadian narrator of Shani Mootoo's story "The Upside-downness of the World" who, as I've discussed elsewhere, rejects Indian food and language as a child in response to the lessons of her British tutor, Mrs Ramsey. However, it is important to see that, for the hegemonic liberal multiculturalist, these acquisitions of other cultures are a choice and epitomize intellectual freedom, whereas for the culturally marked Other they are survival necessities and entrapments. Unlike Mootoo's narrator, who is angry at what she considers the cultural appropriation by her white Canadian friends Meghan and Virginia of Hindi words and superficial preference for *chai* and

[50] Jhumpa Lahiri, "Sexy," 96.

[51] Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day* (New York: Penguin, 1980): 35. See also Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford & Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1990).

[52] Lahiri, "Sexy," 99.

lassi,[53] Lahiri seems to have relatively more empathy with her Euro-American protagonist, who desires a 'taste' of minority cultures, however limited her cultural and linguistic palette.

Lahiri thus translates the different politics of location not only between Americans and Indians, but also between the more traditional Midwesterner and the liberal New Englander. She portrays the 'multiculturalizing' of Middle-Americans, so to speak, in liberal Cambridge, Massachusetts. The wealthy, cosmopolitan world-traveler Dev opens up new cultural, geopolitical, and socio-economic worlds for Miranda. He shows her faraway places on maps, reminisces about playing cricket near the Lake as a boy in Calcutta and being served mango juice by servants. He takes her to the Mapparium at the Christian Science center in Boston, where the interracial lovers stand united on "a transparent bridge, so that they felt as if they were standing in the center of the world. Dev pointed to India [...]."[54] Romancing the sexy foreigner thus allows the provincial, young Midwestern American woman to metaphorically travel to and vicariously experience the exotic sites/sights and tastes of Asia.

While "Sexy" focusses on a young American woman's fascination for the exotic, Lahiri's final story, "The Third and Final Continent," depicts an old Victorian Bostonian lady's approval of colonially educated Indian immigrants and their traditional marriages, and celebrates both Americanness and the South Asian male immigrant as hero. Based on Lahiri's father's life, the story is told by a first-person male narrator in his sixties, who recalls having moved from Calcutta to Boston via London, in 1969, at precisely the moment that the American flag was planted on the moon. The Bengali immigrant Everyman's accomplishment – survival on three continents – is compared to an American's landing on the moon:

> In my son's eyes I see the ambition that had first hurled me across the world. [...] Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are

[53] See my essay "Multiple Hyphenations and Inauthentic Diasporic Subjectivities in Shani Mootoo's *Out on Main Street*" (MS).

[54] Lahiri, "Sexy," 90.

> times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.[55]

Coming to America, then, is paralleled with and symbolized by reaching the moon. There is something commendable, even inspiring, in the poignant depiction of the immigrant's tenacity, survival instinct, and fulfillment of his bourgeois American dream. Yet the staking of roots here seems simplistic. It plays into the model minority stereotypes regarding South Asians, and is not much more nuanced than Bharati Mukherjee's claiming of America.[56]

"The Third and Final Continent" is not only Jhumpa Lahiri's attempt at claiming America, but also the American literati's means of claiming the immigrant writer. The story, which was published in the 1999 summer fiction issue of the *New Yorker*, won it the National Magazine Award for Fiction. Its strength lies in the Bengali man's recounting of his subtle, emotional relationship with his 103-year-old landlady Mrs Croft, a surrogate mother, who provides his first American home.[57] While Lahiri admirably depicts how human compassion and caring translate across age, cultural, and language barriers, the writer's political and aesthetic choices, however, influence her appeal (or lack of it) to varied audiences. This story's positive promise of the easy fulfillment of the American Dream appeals to model minority upper-class South Asian American readers who can identify with the experience, to the educated elite South Asians in the native country wishing to emigrate to the USA, and to the American

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[55] Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent," in *Interpreter of Maladies*, 197–98.

[56] For early critiques of Mukherjee, see the volume *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (New York: Garland, 1993). See also Lavina Shankar "Activism" (1995) and "The Limits of (South Asian) Names and Labels: Postcolonial or Asian American?" in *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America* (Philadelphia PA: Temple UP, 1998).

[57] For a detailed analysis of the protagonist's relationship with Mrs Croft and her house, see Judith Caesar's "American Spaces in the Fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri," *ESC* 31.1 (March 2005): 50–68. Ironically, Caesar, who teaches at the American University at Sharjah in the UAE, compares "The Third and Final Continent" to Lahiri's story "Nobody's Business," which is not part of the American edition of *Interpreter*. It is not clear whether editions overseas included different stories. If so, it would reinforce my point about Lahiri's deftly mediating between different audiences.

majority that perceives itself as a welcoming host. However, in the narrator–protagonist's (and author's) rush to claim American audiences, the story also simplifies the challenges of immigration and erases the complex history of anti-Asian immigration laws that made early twentieth-century South Asian presence in the USA illegal.[58]

Although lauded by mainstream American reviewers as a story about the fulfillment of the promise of America, it is somewhat reductive in its delineation of the American dream and the remnants of Bengali identity three decades after immigration. For Asian American readers, this immigrant story seems ignorant about the history of the race and class struggles faced by many South Asians since the Asian Exclusion Acts of the early 1900s. The narrator's literal and figurative putting down of roots in America, by owning a house in a tree-lined street in suburban Boston and growing tomatoes in his garden, seems superficial. The writer and narrator also seem quite ignorant of the charged cultural and racial politics in America in 1969; there is no mention of the civil rights movements, the struggles for Asian American identity-formation resulting from the 1968 San Francisco State University strikes, or the Vietnam war. This is the America of the post-1965 Immigration Reform Act that, after four decades, had finally lifted the Asian Exclusion Act and allowed South Asian immigration in the advanced professional category. Unfortunately, Lahiri displays no narrative distance or irony here but, rather, a highly simplistic celebration of Americanness:

> We are American citizens now, so that we can collect social security when it is time. Though we visit Calcutta every few years, and bring back more drawstring pajamas and Darjeeling tea, we have decided to grow old here. I work in a small college library. We have a son who

[58] For the experiences of the pre-1965 South Asian male immigrant farmers who lost their legal rights of property ownership, citizenship, including many whose wives were not allowed to join them in the USA for four decades until the immigration ban was lifted, see Lavina D. Shankar & Pallassana R. Balgopal, "South Asian Immigrants Before 1950: The Formation of Ethnic, Symbolic, and Group Identity," *Amerasia Journal* 27.1 (2001): 55–84. See also Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia PA: Temple UP, 1992), and Min Song, "Pahkar Singh's Argument with America," in Shankar & Srikanth, *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America,* 79–104.

> attends Harvard University. Mala no longer drapes the end of her sari over her head, or weeps at night for her parents [...].[59]

The couple's attempts at both americanization and retention of their original culture seem pathetically superficial as they drive their son home from Harvard (the icon of privilege and elite belonging) on weekends "so that he can eat rice with us with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die." Fossilizing and dismissing India as merely the place the protagonist visits to bring back pajamas and Darjeeling tea is not only condescending, but entirely imperialistic.

Similarly, in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," Lahiri focusses on the superficial aspects of material comfort so readily available in the USA and allegedly not at all in India. The ten-year-old protagonist Lilia relates her mother's pride at her daughter's being born in America:

> She seemed genuinely proud of the fact, as if it were a reflection of my character. In her estimation, I knew, I was assured a safe life, an easy life, a fine education, every opportunity. I would never have to eat rationed food, or obey curfews, or watch riots from my rooftop, or hide neighbors in water tanks to prevent them from being shot, as she and my father had. "Imagine having to place her in a decent school. Imagine her having to read during power failures by the light of kerosene lamps. Imagine the pressures, the tutors, the constant exams."[60]

In this brief vignette, Jhumpa Lahiri claims her mainstream middle-class American audience as Lilia's mother proudly claims a universally affluent America and imagines a materially comfortable, guaranteed future for her daughter. Through the mother's words, which lack irony, Lahiri generalizes regarding the ostensibly endless economic opportunities available in the USA, and which are impossible in India.[61] Thus she superficially

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[59] Jhumpa Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent," 197.

[60] Jhumpa Lahiri, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," in *Interpreter of Maladies*, 26–27. It seems ironic here that the Washington online edition of the Indian newspaper *The Hindu* (12 April 2000) states proudly that Lahiri's "stories draw richly from her visits to Calcutta."

[61] This focus on material comforts in the USA is similar to Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *An American Brat* (Minneapolis MI: Milkweed, 1993).

stereotypes the First World–Third World divide. As in Divakaruni's fiction, no distinctions are made about the variances and specifics of material realities based on class, race, location, and so on, in either India or in America. These writers essentialize as universal the binary oppositions between the (lower) middle class in India and the upper (middle) classes in the USA. The wealthy elite in India and the working poor in America are both rendered invisible.

Worldly texts and textual wor(l)ds

To be sure, literature is not ethnography, and neither an ethnic writer nor her fictional character should have to serve as a representative for her entire cultural or national group. And yet, texts operate in worlds where ethnic writings get co-opted as representative of cultural groups. As Edward Said observes, "texts have ways of existing that [...] are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly."[62] "It is not only that any text [...] is a network of often colliding forces, but also that a text in its actually *being* a text is a being in the world; it therefore addresses anyone who reads."[63] Thus, as Lennard Davis says, novels are "both fictional and worldly,"[64] and they "do not depict life, they depict life as it is represented by ideology."[65]

In *Imagining the Nation*, David Leiwei Li clarifies the dilemma of ethnic artists that arises from their historical "under-representation" and "involuntary representation" – their lack of control over how (often) they get represented. Such a "history of iconic oppression" makes a minority group such as Asian Americans "particularly sensitive about the limited exposure it does get, and has ironically increased the representational capacity of existing artistic expressions and images."[66] This hypersensitivity arises from the legacy of negative representations of Asians in Anglo-

[62] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1983): 35.

[63] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*: 33 (Said's emphasis).

[64] Lennard Davis, *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction* (New York & London: Methuen: 1987): 225, quoted in Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 15.

[65] Lennard Davis, *Resisting Novels*, 24; quoted in Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 49.

[66] David Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 52.

American literature by Bret Harte, Jack London, Frank Norris, Louisa May Alcott, John Steinbeck and others, as pointed out by Elaine Kim in 1982.[67] Thus, as Li states succinctly, "Without either election or appointment, the Asian American writer automatically becomes a representative by virtue of membership in an ethnic group,"[68] a sentiment echoed by Meena Alexander's protagonist, the artist Draupadi Dinkins in the novel *Manhattan Music*.[69]

Thus South Asian American women writers like Divakaruni and Lahiri are not only claiming America through their protagonists, but as writers they are also themselves claiming and being claimed by a mainstream popular American readership. I do not wish to suggest that any writer who is popular is, by definition, less interesting in terms of intellectual substance or unworthy of critical study. But it is worth asking who is writing, (about) what, and for whom? Writers like Meena Alexander and Shani Mootoo who intellectualize and raise abstract issues and concerns about the complexities of multi-layered and syncretic cultural identities among diasporics from Africa or Trinidad and do not simply claim – or translate for – American audiences obviously do not appeal as easily to a wide readership. Similarly, writers like Bapsi Sidhwa, Tahira Naqvi or Shauna Singh Baldwin, who represent narrowly focussed experiences of smaller and more particular minority groups such as the Parsees, Muslims or Sikhs, respectively, require readers to gain more intimate knowledge of other cultures and religions that do not convert easily into prize-winning material. To put it bluntly, they do not offer a readily translatable Idiot's Guide to South Asia and South Asian Immigrants series, or a Cliffs-notes version of the subcontinent.

There is a marked difference, on the one hand, between writers who force the mainstream American or a non-South Asian American reader into the position of what Judith Fetterley calls a "resisting reader" (where the author or narrator openly criticizes the host society) and, on the other hand, writers who depict characters who coexist harmoniously with, adapt to, assimilate easily into, and appreciate the new homeland and its earlier

[67] Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature*, 3.

[68] David Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 176.

[69] See Lavina D. Shankar, "Postcolonial Diasporics 'Writing in Search of a Homeland': Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music, Fault Lines*, and *The Shock of Arrival*," *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 12.3 (2001): 285–312.

inhabitants.[70] Simultaneously, they do not expect the host society to adapt or change its modes of behavior. A writer's, narrator's or protagonist's oppositional stance to the host society may be appreciated by academic critics, but is not welcome among the average Barnes & Noble and Borders bookstore customers, Oprah Book Club readers, or national literary prize committees. To have a universalist appeal, the writer must provide some exotic element about other cultures – what David Li terms "armchair tourism" – or an unthreatening, non-oppositional stance to mainstream readers.[71] Wendy Ho's argument about the reasons for Amy Tan's popularity may also be true for an affluent, non-academic South Asian American readership.[72] Unlike the ivory tower, where 'assimilation' is a dirty word that implies selling out to the dominant majority, and criticism and resistance is almost a prerequisite of scholarly endeavors, the majority of readers of bestsellers like Lahiri, Divakaruni or Mukherjee may be other non-academic South Asian immigrants who consider assimilation as an unquestioned prerequisite of professional and personal success. These audiences may be glad to read about their own and the experiences of similar Others, without pondering the political implications of the representations.

Nevertheless, linguistic choice, cultural identity, and audience receptivity are clearly imbued within the politics of English language use and translations, whether for Tagore, Rushdie, or Divakaruni and Lahiri. Nor are South Asian American women at the end of the twentieth century among the first to write in English. As Rama Jha observes in *Perspectives on Indian Fiction in English* (1985), Indian women have written in Eng-

[70] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978).

[71] What David Li says about Kingston's reception and appropriation by a mainstream audience also applies to popular writers like Mukherjee, Divakaruni and Lahiri:

> The narrative hand guides the audience eastward to China, into what is at once unfamiliar geography and secret family lore. China is a repressive space for the Chinese, but the white American reader, an outsider to that land and culture, is invited [...] to enter the fictional space [...]. By virtue of being comfortably ensconced in another country, the reader is granted not only an absolute narrative alibi but also the power and privilege of imaginative travel and epistemological control. (47).

[72] Wendy Ho, *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother–Daughter Writing* (Walnut Creek CA: Altamira, 1999).

lish since the 1890s – including Toru Dutt's novel *Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden* (1878), Cornelia Sorabji's *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), and Ela Sen's *Darkening Days* (1946). Renowned post-Independence women writers in English include Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hossain, Anita Desai, and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala.[73] Yet there is something distinctly different in the contemporary 'ethnic' American writers' relationship to their worldly audiences. Their fiction captures an historical moment in the global hunger for (hence upsurge in?) Indian diasporic women's writing in English. W.B. Yeats's early-twentieth-century raptures over (and his later disdain for) Indian writing in English and Salman Rushdie's fervent defense of it at century's end reveal the ironies of cultural reception and translated audiences which neither of the male writers tunes into, as they both judge Indian literature in English in absolute terms. By contrast, the successful twenty-first-century South Asian American women writers have carved their niche, consciously translating among varied m/other tongues, audiences, and literary canons. They thus simultaneously observe, represent, and communicate with their local neighbors and other globetrotters, entertaining and edifying, multilingual, real and armchair tourists worldwide.[74]

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[73] Rama Jha, "Kamala Markandaya: An Overview," in *Perspectives on Indian Fiction in English*, ed. M.K. Naik (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1985): 162.

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Code-Switching, Shape-Shifting, Asking Different Questions

South Asian Women's Language In and Across Nations

JOSNA REGE

THE 'LANGUAGE DEBATE' has always been a central issue in postcolonial South Asian literary studies – much interrogated, much agonized over, and with good reason. The old chestnuts keep returning: the persistent privilege of English, and the elitism, inauthenticity, and alienation of English-language works. The over-valuation of English and concomitant devaluation of the South Asian languages (including Indian English in my view, though not all would agree) are overlaid and exacerbated by another contentious and recurrent issue, the privileging of South Asian writers in the diaspora; their works, too, are labeled elite, inauthentic, and alienated, and charged with eclipsing the many works in South Asian languages by writers based in the subcontinent. In fact, as the editors of this collection have noted, 'English' and 'diaspora' tend to become conflated, such that the South Asian (or *bhasha*) languages/English opposition is reduced to a locationist, East/West debate. While all the above are doubtless serious issues, all the more so given the dominance of English in the global cultural arena, they make self-evident, even tautological arguments in the literary-critical context and prevent both critics and writers from asking more interesting, nuanced questions – questions of audience, of narrative, of history, of social and cultural identities, genre, style, register, cultural codes, self and

subjectivity. My interest in this essay is to open up space to ask such questions. With reference to the cultural projects of two South Asian writers, C.S. Lakshmi and Rukhsana Ahmad, one located in India, the other in Britain, I will consider some of the new questions that their multi-faceted uses of language are able to raise, and the strategies that they employ in order to raise them.

In the spirit of this collection, the works of these two writers continually translate, transport, and transform: complicating and challenging divisions of language and location by shifting language, register, and genre, translating themselves for the benefit of different audiences, and collaborating with others in and across nations. In my view, they represent a small but emergent tendency among South Asian writers to work in two or more languages and two or more genres.[1] Their multiple placement and grounded cosmopolitanism requires their cultural projects to be studied in a framework that is not exclusively national or transnational. Such a framework allows attention to be paid to other factors in the making of linguistic choices, such as internal divisions, displacements, hierarchies, and transnational cultural flows. As I shall discuss, both writers are feminists committed to making space for women's voices to be heard beyond the confines of the family and religious or ethnic community and the clamor of the nation, rather than forcing an ideology upon them, even a feminist one. Furthermore, both are activists who participate in a variety of collaborative projects, rather than focussing exclusively on their individual acts of literary creation.

The title of our original roundtable at the South Asian conference in Madison, "Is There Nowhere Else That We Can Meet?," framed the language question in terms of finding or reclaiming a new space for South Asian literary studies.[2] These two contemporary South Asian writers create and model such new space(s). Under her pen-name Ambai, C.S. Lakshmi is a leading Tamil writer of experimental fiction, a feminist

[1] To name just a few more South Asian writers who also work in two languages: Kamala Das, the late Gauri Deshpande, Shanta Gokhale, Kiran Nagarkar, Tahira Naqvi.

[2] The editors limited their exploration to Indian writing, but one of my chosen writers, Rukhsana Ahmad, now settled in Britain, is originally from Pakistan. I have chosen to widen the frame, since it is integral to my argument that South Asian critical practice needs to be more flexible and nuanced with regard to such categories as language, location, and nationality. Drawing lines of exclusion along national boundaries fails to allow for the possibility of multiple identities and transnational identifications.

social historian writing in both English and Tamil, and the founder of Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW), a women's archive that maintains a large variety of materials in print, analog, and digital formats, translated into numerous Indian languages. Rukhsana Ahmad creates novels, plays, and journalism in English, and translates Urdu prose and poetry into English (most famously the Pakistani feminist poetry collection *We Sinful Women*[3]). She, too, is the founder of a digital archive, based in Britain but with a global reach – South Asian Literatures in the Diaspora Arts Archive (SALIDAA), which collects a diversity of documents across languages, genres, generations, and national boundaries. Their audiences are diverse as well. Ambai's stories have long been well-known to Tamil readers worldwide and, in translation, to a growing and appreciative pan-Indian and global readership;[4] Rukhsana Ahmad's plays, to British theatergoers and BBC and Pakistani radio audiences; and, through their respective digital archives, to people with access to the internet everywhere.

The title "Is There Nowhere Else That We Can Meet?" evokes an illicit lovers' tryst, doomed to secrecy and frustration, attended by feelings of guilt and betrayal, at once scandalous and alluring. But characterizing the oft-embattled parties as lovers also suggests mutual desire, whereas the relationships between South Asians and English, between English and the other South Asian languages, between the subcontinent and its global diaspora, although sometimes a love affair, are often unequal, exploitative, and not altogether consensual. This is neither a new phenomenon nor one limited to the postcolonial period. In her collection *The Perishable Empire*, Meenakshi Mukherjee describes writing in English by colonially educated Indians in the nineteenth century as something of a guilty pleasure, engaged in secretly in diaries and private correspondence by writers whose public production was largely in their mother tongues. Mukherjee suggests that one of the reasons English writing was not prominent during the years when cultural nationalism was gathering strength is that it was seen as a betrayal of the mother tongue and the motherland.[5] However, it

[3] Rukhsana Ahmad, translator of and "Introduction" to *We Sinful Women* (London: Women's Press, 1991).

[4] Ambai's collection, *In a Forest, A Deer*, tr. Lakshmi Holmström (Delhi: Oxford UP India, 2006), was awarded the 2006 Crossword Award for translation in February 2007.

[5] Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 2000): 9–10.

is important to note that many, even most, prominent writers did not feel compelled to choose one or the other: they were bilingual or multilingual, speaking to different audiences – regional, national, international – in different languages and through different media. Many of them were multiply located even then, charting the routes of a diaspora that reached out to fellow-Indians across the subcontinent and around the world and called them to themselves and to the freedom struggle.[6] Twenty-first-century writers of South Asia and the South Asian diaspora similarly find themselves continually shifting gears to meet their different audiences and constituencies on common ground, but at a faster pace, using new communications media.

To return to the task at hand: if we are to clear spaces where we can entertain the complexities of language and location, they must be spaces in which both sides have a stake and where it is possible to speak of a transaction (to use Harish Trivedi's term[7]) or a true commingling rather than a one-way flow of knowledge and power, intra-, inter-, and transnationally. By what strategies are contemporary South Asian writers such as C.S. Lakshmi and Rukhsana Ahmad able to clear such spaces?

Both writers trouble a clear-cut native/diaspora divide by their own complex positioning. As a Tamil, C.S. Lakshmi is an outsider–insider in Mumbai, since there is a large and well-established Tamil population who migrated to Bombay decades ago to work in the textile mills. When organizations like the Shiv Sena first organized to break the textile workers' unions, the Tamils became the target of their xenophobic hostility (directed later at Muslims and Christians as well). As a public intellectual in the arts, Lakshmi upholds the traditional cosmopolitanism of Bombay, threatened since the early 1990s by the nativist Shiv Sena. As a caste Hindu by birth, secular but not secular*ist*,[8] Lakshmi also calls attention, both in her fiction and in the women's archives that she founded and directs, to the work of people marginalized by the dominant national identity: women

[6] Tagore wrote and travelled in the Americas, Britain, and Japan besides India; Vivekananda and Pandita Ramabai, in the United States; Lala Lajpat Rai, in Switzerland, Britain, and the U.S.; Gandhi in Britain and South Africa; Raja Rao in France, Mulk Raj Anand in England, and the list goes on.

[7] Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993).

[8] I presented a paper of the same title on C.S. Lakshmi's story "Black Horse Square" at the Siting Secularism conference at Oberlin College, Ohio, in April 2002.

(of course), members of minority religions and ethnicities, and Dalit ('untouchable') writers and activists. As a secular Muslim in Britain, where Muslims are increasingly embattled, Rukhsana Ahmad challenges white British prejudices, without shying away from internal criticism of the Muslim community. While recognizing the internal diversity of the South Asian communities in Britain, she also seeks to foster a sense of solidarity and belonging among them at a time when they are becoming increasingly fragmented and marginalized.[9]

In the contested sphere of language, where English gains greater global dominance by the day, C.S. Lakshmi (as Ambai) has persisted in writing fiction in Tamil, while living in Mumbai through a period when there has been an aggressive Marathi-only movement. However, with SPARROW, she conducts oral history interviews in a number of different languages, records the responses in the language of the speaking subject, writes them up differently depending on their intended audience, as pamphlets, books, and scholarly articles, and simultaneously arranges for their translation and publication in a number of languages besides English and for their production as films and workshops. This continual shifting between and among a number of languages and linguistic registers allows her not only to reach a much more diverse audience, even including neo- and non-literates, but also prevents her being pigeonholed as either a 'regional' or a pan-Indian writer. Rukhsana Ahmad's English writing constantly shifts its setting, from South Asia to Britain and back, thus challenging assumptions and cultural stereotypes about location-based differences in class, gender, and religion. Her plays address contemporary issues in both Britain and South Asia. Even as Ahmad's work maintains a deep affection for her cultural heritage – especially in the strength of family ties, mother–daughter relationships in particular – it does not shy away from conflict either *within* cultural groups or *between* them. She depicts intergenerational hostility between South Asian women in Britain, as well as gaping class, gender, and communal divides in Pakistan and India.[10]

Readily acknowledging the imbalances between South Asian languages and English, C.S. Lakshmi notes simply that "writing in any Indian language is not considered good enough." She makes some personal observations about the pitfalls of writing in English:

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[9] Interview with Rukhsana Ahmad, March 2005.
[10] Rukhsana Ahmad, *The Hope Chest* (London: Virago, 1996).

> I find stories set in the Indian context written in English difficult to read when it comes to dialogues. Also I find that the moment you begin to write in English you begin to describe things which you would normally not do in the Indian language [...]. There is a constant urge to explain and detail things to an unknown reader who cannot understand and whose interest you have to hold.[11]

Here Lakshmi raises a commonly voiced concern about the difficulty of expressing an Indian reality in English, but does not employ the language of (in)authenticity, instead identifying particular areas of difficulty for linguistic and cultural translation. Nevertheless, despite her skepticism about English as a creative medium for fiction set in India, Lakshmi writes large volumes of prose non-fiction in English – journalism, screenplays for documentary films, scholarly research, grant-writing, advocacy – as Dr C.S. Lakshmi. I shall discuss her different personae later in the essay.

Rukhsana Ahmad, who until very recently has done all her writing in English, echoes C.S. Lakshmi's thoughts on the privileging of English and the corresponding denigration of South Asian languages. Of her undergraduate education in Karachi, she writes:

> Although considerable lip service was paid to Urdu as the national language, in the real world of jobs and employment opportunities, Urdu-medium people had a lesser value than the English-language inheritors of the Queen's language [...]. The country is still ruled by people who are heirs to a ruling Western elite.[12]

Ahmad has always regretted her loss of Urdu as her primary creative medium: "my education [...] firmly persuaded me that literature was the preserve of people who lived in London, or, at worst, in Bath [...]. By the time I realized what Urdu and the regional languages of the Subcontinent should have meant to me it was almost too late." However, she does not use her migration to Britain to account for this loss but, rather, her higher education in post-Independence Pakistan:

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[11] In Subasree Krishnaswamy, "An Interview with Ambai," womencrossing.org http://www.womenswriting.com/WriterDetails.asp?WriterID=242

[12] Rukhsana Ahmad, "In Search of A Talisman," in *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa*, ed. Ferdinand Dennis & Naseem Khan (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000): 108.

> It would be less than honest [...] to now claim that I would have written only in Urdu [if I had never migrated to England] – my association [...] with the English department of Karachi University had already nailed the coffin of that possibility long before my decision to settle abroad.[13]

Rather than simply accepting her fate and resigning herself to writing exclusively in English, she declares, "I have [...] promised myself that I will attempt to write in Urdu at some point in my life."[14] And in fact she has recently fulfilled this promise, as I shall discuss later in this essay.

Code-switching

On the most literal level, 'code-switching' refers to linguistic shifts, particularly within a single work. *In a Forest, A Deer*, Ambai's second collection of stories in English translation, challenged the translator to find ways of calling attention to the wide "range of references and quotations from many languages [...] used" in it. The translator Lakshmi Holmström describes the strategies she employed in the translation to "retain the music of this code-switching by indicating, wherever possible, when a language other than Tamil [was] being used."[15] Code-switching can also refer to cultural codes designating gender, religious, class, or caste norms. Holmström describes Ambai's "search for a new language [...] a new and freer form of expression in Tamil which articulates more truly the experience of women" rather than "reinforcing popular and conventional images."[16] In a 2005 English column in *The Hindu*, "Different Registers: Questions for the Custodians of Culture," C.S. Lakshmi challenges Tamil cultural codes that continue to regulate middle-class women's bodies and behavior, requiring them to be pure, modest, and, above all, respectable, in the name of their *karpu*, or chastity, and Tamil culture.[17] While she

[13] Ruksana Ahmad, "In Search of A Talisman," 113–14.

[14] "In Search of A Talisman," 108.

[15] Lakshmi Holmström, "Translator's Note," in Ambai, *In A Forest, a Deer* (New Delhi; Oxford UP, 2006): ix.

[16] Lakshmi Holmström, "Introduction" to Ambai, *In A Forest, a Deer,* tr. Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi; Oxford UP, 2006): 1.

[17] For further discussion of *karpu,* going back to the Tamil epic *Silapathikaram*, see Mala Kadar, "The Myth of Kannaki: The Concept of Chastity and Power," sangam.org (13 October 2003): http://www.sangam.org/articles/view/?id=27

reserves her creative writing for her mother tongue, she nonetheless challenges the gendered hypocrisies of Tamil codes.

In Ambai's story "Age," set in the home of an Indian immigrant woman in Britain during a visit by a friend from India, the code-switching functions on multiple levels to highlight the hypocrisy of a rigid adherence to cultural rituals. Ironically, the story begins with Bhagirathi, the Indian visitor, lecturing her immigrant friend Lajwanti for failing to adhere to Indian core values such as hospitality and for reducing Indian culture to a few rituals:

> "You are trying to keep the culture of India alive by lighting Dipavali lamps and making kolams on the floor [...] to contain culture within a few matters. You are binding it down, refusing to let it grow."[18]

And yet, when a young Chilean friend of Lajwanti's comes to meet the Indian visitor, Bhagirathi, who, put off by Gabriella's foreignness, is initially less than hospitable, is humbled as Gabriella sits on the floor, Indian-style, and pours out her traumatic story of torture and exile from her homeland. In a powerful closing scene, Bhagirathi *becomes* Gabriella's distant mother in a moment of compassion for and identification with the young woman, who has no choice but to remain in "a world which spoke a different language."[19] Initially smug in her sense of cultural authenticity, Bhagirathi learns from this young Chilean political exile how to let her cultural values break their national bounds and finds herself extending spontaneous hospitality to a suffering stranger. Linguistic code-switching in the story also subtly underscores the message, as Bhagirathi and Lajwanti speak to each other in Tamil and Hindi respectively, neither of them speaking the same language to each other any more than they can speak Gabriella's mother tongue to her. Nonetheless, Bhagirathi and Gabriella are able to communicate perfectly adequately in English, and in the wordless moment of transformation there is no need for translation.

C.S. Lakshmi and Rukhsana Ahmad's code-switching extends to the discursive codes of nationalism, as their works complicate a locationist, statist, or unitary sense of national identity. In a 2005 interview, Ahmad spoke ruefully of the atomization of the South Asian population in Britain

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[18] Ambai, *A Purple Sea: Short Stories by Ambai*, tr. Lakshmi Holmström (Chennai: East/West, 1992): 96–97.

[19] Ambai, *Purple Sea*, 105.

today, fragmented as it is along ethnic, regional, linguistic, religious, generational, and national lines, and accordingly underscores the importance for her of the umbrella term ‘South Asian’ as a way of providing a rallying point for their interests:

> My big worry is that the identities that people are going to be thrown back into are tending to be more parochial. They’re going to be religious, they’re going to be regional, they are going to be linguistic, they are going to be cultural in a narrow sense. SALIDAA is one of the only organizations left that aspire to be South Asian. [...] In contrast with the other smaller identities, then, Asian/South Asian is an inclusive, trans-national category, which promotes a greater tolerance and cosmopolitanism within it.[20]

Ahmad’s play *Song for a Sanctuary* (1990), set in a largely Asian women’s shelter and based loosely on a real-life murder of a woman by her husband who broke into the shelter, highlights the tragedy of internal divisions among the women, who speak entirely at cross purposes even when it would seem that they ought to share critical interests. In general, Ahmad’s work both evokes and encourages commonalities across national borders and points to conflicts within them. Her play *River on Fire* (2000) underscores the lengths to which people will go to impose their religious and ideological codes, even upon the dead.[21] Seema, a secular Muslim playwright of Hindu origin settled in Britain, dies while in Bombay to oversee the film production of one of her screenplays. Against the historical backdrop of the January 1993 Hindu–Muslim riots, Seema’s children, now based in both India and Britain, disagree over the kind of burial she should have. Finally, her son-in-law, an ambitious politician during a period when it pays to be Hindu, gives her a ritual cremation to serve his political interests; while in the parallel plot of the film-within-the-play, the director of Seema’s play distorts the author’s intent to suit the political climate. As the spirit of the deceased mother comments, looking on: “It was a story about power and politics not faith” (48). In ‘real life’, too, Ahmad, who often writes radio plays on commission, has continually been frustrated by how writing projects are chosen and shaped

[20] Ruksana Ahmad, Interview with Josna Rege, 14 March 2005.

[21] Rukhsana Ahmad, *River on Fire*, first produced by Kali Theatre Company, 2001.

for her, and must struggle to retain authorial control over her own language.[22]

Shape-shifting

In South Asia, the novel developed in close association with the rise of English and an English-educated class, and today it is by far the most favored genre on the global stage. Those South Asian writers who have received the most press and the largest literary advances from publishers have invariably been novelists. It is the novel that is in greatest demand in the global literary marketplace, and, again invariably, it is the novel in English. Rukhsana Ahmad, C.S. Lakshmi, and many writers like them deliberately employ a variety of genres, reaching audiences of different linguistic, ethnic, class, and gender composition with each. Rukhsana Ahmad writes stage-plays that travel Britain in repertory, radio dramas that are broadcast in both England and Pakistan, journalism for both the Asian and mainstream British press, grants for SALIDAA, the digital arts archive of which she is co-founder and trustee, short stories that are widely anthologized, as well as novels, the genre for which she is probably the least well-known. Besides the Tamil short stories, for which she is best-known, Lakshmi writes English newspaper columns and reviews for major Indian dailies, scholarly books and essays, screenplays for documentaries, oral histories of female artists, inexpensive booklets and pamphlets, and grants for SPARROW, the women's archives of which she is the founder-director.

In myth and folklore, shape-shifting is often a physical transformation that makes possible what has not been possible before. For our two writers, a continual shifting among different genres and personae creates transformative possibilities as well. "Ambai" and "Dr. C.S. Lakshmi" serve as authorial personae for the different genres, languages, and registers in which Lakshmi writes, the former being the prominent writer of Tamil short fiction, and the latter the feminist scholar and women's cultural archivist who writes predominantly in English. However, although C.S. Lakshmi has two distinct writing personae, she makes it clear that they are not sealed categories: "they do merge. What I gather as a researcher does make its way into my fiction and some of my fictional style

[22] Ruksana Ahmad, Interview with Josna Rege, 14 March 2005.

of writing does influence my non-fiction writing."[23] While Rukhsana Ahmad uses one name, she, too, presents different personae as genre and audience demand: the British artist who teaches creative writing to predominantly white mainstream students and is at ease with the discourse of Arts and Heritage grants; the secular Muslim who is able to speak to the Asian community in Urdu and to the jittery mainstream community in flawless Queen's English; the feminist who is fiercely critical of Islamic laws and restrictive family practices as they affect women, and yet is keenly sensitive to the vulnerability of Muslims in Britain today. Ahmad asserts: "I use each [identity] when I want to. I am not enslaved by any of them [...]. I can, like a chameleon, call on one of several colours, sidestep the preconception of others and survive in both worlds."[24] Such shape-shifting can allow for movement, even the possibility of transformation, in situations where they would seem to be no wriggle room at all. The *Piyar ka Passport* project is a case in point.

Rukhsana Ahmad describes *Piyar ka Passport* as a "radio drama series in Urdu commissioned by the [BBC] World Service Trust, incorporating issues around forced marriages." As the lead writer, Ahmad worked with a team of Pakistani writers and, as she put it, was finally able to find her voice in Urdu.[25] The border-crossing series was broadcast in twelve episodes in March 2006 on the Urdu Service of the BBC World Service and FM radios in Pakistan, reaching Urdu-speaking audiences in both countries.[26] Like much of Ahmad's writing, the series was research-based, and sought to start a two-way conversation that obviously allowed her to reach audiences and generate discussions that would not have been possible in the medium of English. Innovative spin-off programming included audio testimonies from women about their experiences with forced marriages, a televised debate in both London and Lahore, audience comments following the series, and a live-phone-in program broadcast at the half-way point of the series, in which "Rukhsana Ahmad, lead writer of the drama and story editor, Saqlain Imam and Javed Soomro of the Urdu

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[23] Subasree Krishnaswamy, "Interview," np.

[24] Ahmad, "In Search," 114.

[25] From email correspondence with Josna Rege.

[26] The "Piyar ka Passport" site is at BBC World Service Trust. Impact Research: "Piyar ka Passport: Using Radio Drama to Foster Dialogue about Social Issues in Pakistan" http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/Pakistan_Final.pdf

Service [...] responded to questions and comments from BBC listeners [...] and online users [... who] were invited to share their views on the many themes arising from the drama, including forced marriage, elopement, the generation gap, family honour, drug addiction and gender issues."[27] The televised, tape-recorded, and phone-in responses and testimonies are available on the series website, as are their English transcriptions.

During the phone-in program, Ahmad responded to (mostly male) criticism of the show respectfully yet firmly, readily acknowledging valid points made by the callers, yet insisting on the reality of the problem of forced marriages, making it clear to callers from Pakistan that forced marriages were a problem not only in Pakistan but in Britain as well. Because the lead writer of the series was a British-based South Asian – specifically, a Pakistani – woman, Pakistani audiences and officials could not so easily dismiss her as they might have a white Briton. Furthermore, because she was collaborating with a team of writers and actors based in Pakistan, the series could not be seen as a neocolonial imposition of alien values. Because the television program was composed of a panel of Pakistani authorities on women and marriage who responded to questions from the geographically disparate audiences, Pakistanis felt that their views on the issues were being seriously incorporated into the discussion; and as the series and its companion programs were all in Urdu, the series became part of a transnational yet internal conversation that brought Pakistanis together on the issue, whether they lived in London or in Lahore. And both the Urdu medium and the radio drama genre (as opposed to television series) may have enabled the program to reach out to a more far-flung audience, and to reach listeners in more isolated spaces.

Opening up confined spaces is a central concern of C.S. Lakshmi/Ambai's work as well. The imaginative space of Ambai's stories is filled with images of water and flight, animals and birds, that model a less rigidly structured, more fluid language.

These images speak simultaneously of entrapment and the possibilities – or, at least, dreams – of freedom. The gendered relationship between silence and space in women's language is one of C.S. Lakshmi/Ambai's

[27] BBC World Service Trust. Impact Research: "Piyar ka Passport: Using Radio Drama to Foster Dialogue about Social Issues in Pakistan" http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/Pakistan_Final.pdf

central concerns. When space, whether discursive or physical, is denied, language is stifled and creative artists are driven into silence. In "Dealing with Silence, Space and Everyday Life," a discussion of three Tamil women writers' works, C.S. Lakshmi is attentive to the "weight of the silence" in these works that "smothers language and existence," reading between the lines to tease out that which cannot be spoken. She concludes: "the space (within a household) exists, but the works are about different levels of its obliteration. A process that silences, and leads to a silence devoid of language."[28] In all her multifaceted cultural production, such as SPARROW, C.S. Lakshmi creates spaces for women's work to enter the realm of language and circulate more freely in larger spaces, either through the spoken and written word – oral history interviews, translations – or through readings of visual documents such as bequests of family photographs, magazine advertisements, films, plays, and all patriarchal spaces that rob women of voice. However, at the same time as C.S. Lakshmi's and SPARROW's interviews enable women's voices to enter the historical record, Lakshmi takes care to respect women's silences, recognizing that they may sometimes be a product of women's own choice and sometimes even spaces of refuge. Both Lakshmi's fiction and her larger cultural production use language in such a way as to expose unspoken linguistic, symbolic, and cultural codes that silence and confine women. When she interviews women, she does not seek to put words into their mouths, positioning them as either victims or heroines. In the introduction to her book of conversations with women musicians, she writes:

> It took me a while to realize that there will always be something hidden and something revealed. The point is to see the politics of hiding and revealing; of shifting spaces and altering language; of boundaries and erasures.[29]

Rather than imposing a particular form upon the interview, she seeks to enter into a free-flowing, two-way conversation.

Translation is also a two-way process for both writers. Until recently, Rukhsana Ahmad wrote entirely in English but also undertook Urdu–Eng-

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[28] C.S. Lakshmi, "Dealing with Silence, Space and Everyday Life," in *Ambai: A Katha Perspectives Book* (New Delhi: Katha, 1999): 101.

[29] C.S. Lakshmi, "Introduction" to *The Singer and the Song: Conversations with Women Musicians* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000): xlvi.

lish translation projects. As a member of the immigrant generation in Britain, she is very much aware of the British-born generations' increasing loss of the mother tongues of their parents, as well as her own loss of Urdu in neocolonial Pakistan. In *We Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry* (1991), which was translated, edited, and introduced by Rukhsana Ahmad, she sought to present to a wider audience the poetry of a number of women, most, but not all of whom were living in Pakistan during the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, whose 1979 Hudood Ordnances sought to subject women to fundamentalist Islamic laws. Notably, she did not erase the Urdu in the English publication, but retained the original of each poem on the facing page. Further, the collection's title did not mention Pakistan, the national origin of the poets, but, rather, Urdu – a language with a rich poetic heritage unique to the subcontinent and spoken, recited, and sung not only in India and Pakistan but throughout the South Asian diaspora. In so doing, she disengaged a language and literature from ownership by a particular nation-state, highlighting instead its free-flowing currency throughout the subcontinent and its diaspora. In *Piyar ka Passport*, she moved from translating to actually writing in Urdu, broadcasting to Urdu-speaking South Asians in both Britain and Pakistan in a format that invited a two-way conversation and made the Urdu medium primary, the English transcription following after for the benefit of non-Urdu-speaking South Asian visitors to the program's website.

C.S. Lakshmi, who, like so many who have adopted Mumbai as their home, speaks Hindi, Marathi, and English as well as her mother tongue, lives with linguistic multiplicity and incorporates it into all of her work. Speaking of her own fiction, Ambai "wishes [...] she had more readers in Tamil." She does not undertake translations of her work; she is "happy [that] translations are available," but cautions that a great deal is lost in translation.[30] Under Lakshmi's direction, however, SPARROW publishes original publications annually in a number of languages, along with translations of its publications and recordings into English and several Indian languages, not only the ones most commonly spoken in Mumbai.

[30] Subasree Krishnaswamy, "Interview," np.

Archive projects and the national narrative

Both Geraldine Forbes and Antoinette Burton have spoken of the importance of the archive in mapping women's spaces and documenting women's records of their own lives.[31] In the gendered space of the nation, in which women's spaces and voices are privatized and denied historical status, archives can open up these enclosed spaces and introduce them into the historical record. It is significant, then, that both Rukhsana Ahmad and C.S. Lakshmi have founded cultural archives that seek to create new cultural spaces within and across nations. According to Ahmad, South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive (SALIDAA) arose in 1999 out of conversations with her friend and collaborator Lakshmi Holmström (also, interestingly, Ambai's Tamil translator), out of a concern that the cultural records of the early generation of post-war South Asian immigrants to Britain would disappear altogether unless they were protected and preserved (SALIDAA website). Rukhsana Ahmad took up the task, and, by mounting an argument that South Asians were an integral part of Britain's cultural heritage, secured a Heritage grant from the Arts Council and the New Opportunities Fund from the national Lottery that have made possible the hiring of a small staff, the creation of a website, and the digitization of a number of documents that are now uploaded and fully searchable. The archives include works in five different areas: literature, visual arts, theatre, dance, and music. Ahmad has now stepped back into a supporting role as one of SALIDAA's trustees, as it has completed the first digitization project successfully and is finding new ways to make its resources available both to South Asians themselves and to the larger national and international communities.

In his essay "Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'the Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation," Stuart Hall argues for the need to challenge the nationalist notion of 'heritage' in contemporary Britain.[32] It is ironic that SALIDAA has been able to secure National Heritage funding to redefine

[31] See Geraldine Forbes, "Locating and Preserving Documents: The First Step in Writing Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 14.4 (Winter 2003): 169–78, and Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (New York & Delhi: Oxford UP, 2003.

[32] Stuart Hall, "Whose heritage? Un-settling 'the heritage', re-imagining the post nation," in *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture, and Theory*, ed. Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt & Ziauddin Sardar (London & New York: Continuum, 2002): 72–85.

this concept: thus Margaret Thatcher's 1980s conservative bulwark of (white) British Tradition against postcolonial immigrants of color now includes the cultural contributions of South Asians. SALIDAA argues that South Asians are an integral part of Britain's cultural heritage, and that the definition of Britishness must include them and their histories.[33] To insist on this point is a critical cultural intervention in the wake of the 2005 London bombings, when British Asians, especially Muslims, are increasingly being told that they must assimilate to the 'British way of life' or face potential deportation – love it or leave it.[34]

SPARROW was first registered as a trust in 1988, and has grown over the years from a room in C.S. Lakshmi's home, through rented premises and a staff of 22, to – at last, in 2007 – a building of its own. It includes among its current programs an active oral history project, a video recording project, workshops at schools and colleges, a media watch project, "Making Women Visible," a women's NGO documentation project, a multilingual collection, a translation project, and "Global Feminisms," an international collaboration coordinated by the University of Michigan which is documenting women's oral histories from India, China, Poland, and the USA. As Director of SPARROW, C.S. Lakshmi seeks a diversity of funding from both India and abroad, never letting the funding set the organization's agenda.[35] An ever-changing selection of documents from its archive and activities is digitized and uploaded onto SPARROW's website.

SPARROW highlights the work of extraordinary women from all walks of life, elevating as everyday heroines women who have fought for freedom from colonial rule, been displaced by Partition, work in non-traditional trades or professions for women, or who have not got the national recognition they deserved because of their ethnic/religious/linguistic minority or subaltern status. While SALIDAA seeks to expand the idea of Britain's cultural heritage to include the contributions of South Asians, SPARROW seeks the inclusion of women's voices in India's national narrative. However, even as SPARROW seeks women's inclu-

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[33] Interview with Paola Marchionni, Project Director of SALIDAA, March 2005.

[34] Mark Rice–Oxley, "In Britain, Growing Objections to Multicultural Society? *Christian Science Monitor* (4 August 2005): http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0804/p07s01-woeu.html

[35] Rege, "Interview," 2006, and see SPARROW website, sparrowonline.org

sion in the nation-space, C.S. Lakshmi is alert to the co-optation of women by the national project and to all exclusions by the nation-state, not only on the basis of gender. Her scholarship, fiction, and journalism all reflect this awareness, from her publication of SPARROW's first oral history booklet, *Pramila*, on the late Esther Victoria Abraham, a Bombay film actress of the 1930s and 1940s whose Indian Jewish identity was erased by her Hindu stage name; to her story "A Movement, a Folder, Some Tears," in which Sakina's suicide is born of her despair as an Indian Muslim in the aftermath of Gujarat, 2002;[36] to her "Different Registers" column in *The Hindu*, in which she chooses to profile the elderly Gandhian, Poppatti Haranandani, as the freedom-fighter routinely demanded by journalists as Independence Day approaches. Refusing to give the press the pabulum they seek, Lakshmi writes: "Poppatti talks about partition, her Sindhi identity and [...] about the lack of a homeland she can call her own. Belonging and not fully belonging, both are memories the nation evokes."[37]

To return to the novel, which, as we noted at the outset, is preeminently the genre in which South Asian writing in English has achieved global success: the novel is also preeminently the genre of the individual. An important difference between the writers most caught up in the recriminating language-and-location debates and those I have been discussing in this essay is that they produce their multifaceted cultural projects not only in more than one language and more than one genre, but also in more than one person; that is, while their fiction is written individually, much of the rest of their work is produced collaboratively. As such, criticism of their work never becomes as personal as does the criticism of globally successful novelists. While both Rukhsana Ahmad and C.S. Lakshmi are self-employed, and are thus able to behave as free agents to some extent, they choose to engage in projects that require them to remain accountable to their multiple audiences.

Ambai's gently humorous-yet-poignant story "*Vaaganam*," which begins by celebrating the chariots in which goddesses, queens, and epic heroines have traveled, traces a girl's persistent lack of access to and fraught relationship with vehicles as she grows to womanhood, even as

[36] Ambai, *In A Forest, A Deer*, 181.

[37] C.S. Lakshmi, "A Nation's Memories," *The Hindu* (8 January 2004): http://www.hindu.com/lr/2004/08/01/stories/2004080100220400.htm

she continues to dream of flying. In the final segment of the story, the woman comes upon a new vehicle:

> A vehicle without wheels, which would not pollute the environment. A vehicle which moved without colliding into anything, without raising a noise, or shedding blood [...]. An electronic vehicle. A mouse vehicle [...] Mounted on this, she traveled great distance along paths of communication [...] She, who was descended from all those who had chariots composed of snake, lion, swan, and horse, now had a vehicle of her very own. She began to seek the right electronic moment to destroy demons and meet the gods.[38]

This heady vision of the Internet, while clearly a utopian one, does gesture toward new possibilities for movement and even cultural intervention. Ambai recognizes that this is virtual space, a new imaginary, even as it may offer possible new arenas for action. While this new mouse-driven vehicle offers her vehicle-challenged protagonist new vistas in which she may rise from the mud and, goddess-like, become airborne, Lakshmi's work demonstrates her clear-eyed recognition of the ways in which the freedom and accessibility afforded by the Internet can limit the freedom of those who do not have the same ease of mobility. By deliberate choice, SPARROW does not make its oral histories easily accessible through its digital archives, insisting instead that researchers who are interested in the archives travel in person to Mumbai to consult them, 'on the ground', as it were; nor does it allow audiotapes or photocopied transcriptions of unpublished interviews to circulate outside of its physical archives, risking the violation of women's spaces and once again allowing their voices to be appropriated and co-opted by and for others.[39]

Asking different questions

While language and place are of central importance to both writers, neither of them spends time agonizing about problems such as the dominance of English or the privilege and lack of authenticity of 'outsiders'. Instead, they find ways, through their multifaceted cultural production, to address and redress these problems. To return to our original image of the

[38] Ambai, *In A Forest, A Deer*, 73.
[39] Josna Rege, "Interview with C.S. Lakshmi," 1 June 2006.

stigmatized couple seeking a new space in which to meet, C.S. Lakshmi and Rukhsana Ahmad open up these historically stifling and polarized pairings, whether linguistic or geographical. Countries and communities need not be homogeneous and exclusive, just as language need not be characterized as a jealous lover. Without denying the complex cultural politics and social inequities that obtain in such relationships, both writers work to create and imagine more material and discursive space for dialogue and diversity, offering new possibilities for individual and collective transformation, for room to move, and, simply, to be.

Cultural flexibility

Despite the utopian tone sounded in "*Vaaganam*" on the ease of movement through virtual space, and the freedom afforded by flexible identities, C.S. Lakshmi and Rukhsana Ahmad are fully aware of the pitfalls of time–space compression, as well as its possibilities.[40] If they are successful in maintaining such flexibility through their continual shifting of language and register, do they also pay a price in a world that needs to fix people in categories? And if language is the primary carrier of culture, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has asserted,[41] what, then, are the implications for writers who routinely work in more than one language and culture? Do they indeed have the freedom to shift between them? Lakshmi Holmström speaks to this in her introduction to Ambai's 2006 collection of stories, *In a Forest, a Deer*.[42] Commenting on Ambai's story "Parasakti and Others in a Plastic Box," in which the narrator's elderly mother travels to look after her daughter in America, carrying "her [...] pickles, her spices, and her most important Gods," she writes:

> Ambai suggests this sense of the self, fluid and changing, is not developed by geographical location alone, nor by the conventions and rules of a community. A personal history, with which you are at ease, is

[40] David Harvey's concept, developed in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford & Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1990).

[41] See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "The Politics of Language in African Literature," in Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind* (London: James Currey & Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986): 4–33.

[42] First published in Tamil as *Kaatil Oru Maan [A Deer in the Forest]: a Collection of Stories* (Nagerkoil: Kalachuvadu, 2000).

> what you take with you wherever you go, and wherever you come from.

Holmström makes a distinction here:

> To be able to feel firm ground wherever you tread, rather than to be rooted in one place – that seems to be Ambai's goal.[43]

Interestingly, Rukhsana Ahmad makes a similar point in her essay on the intangible "talisman" that serves a touchstone for her work as a writer:

> I feel a deep connection with my past that cannot be severed. [However,] I have a suspicion that people who dig their roots too deep and refuse to be transplanted not only confine the choice of air they will breathe in, but worse, lose the chance to find the space they might have found elsewhere to grow and spread out, unchecked by the strictures of the past.

At the same time, she does acknowledge a concomitant loss:

> The knowledge that I can [...] sidestep the preconceptions of others and survive in both worlds with a code that is not parochial or narrow in any sense but acts like an unfailing talisman, on the whole is a fair return, I think, for the loss of a few certainties and a false sense of security that has fed on an unwillingness to change. Sadly, as always, the talisman comes with a condition. You have to surrender the right to belong.[44]

For Ahmad, her "undoing and remaking of identity," while it has been a tremendous source of growth, has necessarily come at a cost.

To return to the point with which I began this essay: it is easy to assert that many writers find strategies to sidestep the circular debate over language and location in South Asian literature. However, it is not so easy for them to do so in the current highly polarized and politicized socio-political climate, in which undivided loyalties are demanded despite their patent impossibility, particularly for multiply placed persons. At the end of her 2005 interview with me, Rukhsana Ahmad acknowledged that "identity is a bit of a trap." She resists being pigeon-holed, even as she

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[43] Holmström, "Introduction," 5.

[44] Ruksana Ahmad, "In Search," 114–15.

knows that it is inevitable. As a writer, as a woman, as a migrant, she continually asks herself: "What do I hold on to, what is it I can take with me that can grow, [what can I] draw upon differently at different times?" But there is a price to be paid for this continual flying without perching,[45] even while it allows the writers to remain open and flexible. Fancy footwork, keeping constantly on the move, creates the space within which Ahmad does her work, and as a freelance writer, she has become adept at doing so, but she must live without the security of a settled sense of belonging. C.S. Lakshmi, too, working hard to survive while remaining beholden to neither state nor foreign funders as the founder-director of SPARROW, works magic in creating a virtual space for her women's archives, but finds material reality more precarious. While her archive is dedicated solely to women, she, too, hates being pigeon-holed as a "woman writer, for it is a category used to denote inferiority."[46] While Ambai's stories are filled with images of birds in free flight, on the ground SPARROW must continually hop from place to place seeking crumbs to sustain itself. In spite of SPARROW's virtual reach, it still lacks a permanent 'nest', its website acknowledging that "space was and is the major hurdle that SPARROW has to overcome."[47] Both writers certainly create more room to move, but in doing so, they necessarily challenge essentialized conceptions of linguistic or geographical identity for South Asian literature, whether on the subcontinent or in the diaspora. Their exemplary work challenges scholars of South Asian literature to develop critical practices with comparable flexibility and range.

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[45] The reference is to one of my favorite proverbs in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, addressing the necessity of adaptation for survival: "Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching" (17).

[46] Krishnaswamy, "Interview," np.

[47] "A Nest for SPARROW," Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women: http://www.sparrowonline.org/anest.htm (accessed 29 September 2005).

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One *Bhasha* Writer's Side of the Coin

MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR

IN THE FALL OF 2005, I had occasion to attend, in Madison, Wisconsin, a meeting of Indian writers writing in English. Most of them were NRI [non-resident Indian] writers and seemed to be an anguished lot. While sitting through their animated discussions over diaspora, their relationship with the Western reader as well as his Indian counterpart, a peculiar sentiment seemed to crop up from time to time: their uneasy relationship with '*bhasha*' writers, as they called those of us who write in the regional languages of India. There was a scholarly discussion of whether they should call us 'vernacular', 'regional' or '*bhasha*' writers. ("Call us anything. What difference does it make to us?" I found myself muttering.) They seemed to have a difficult relationship with their Indian colleagues writing in *bhashas*. They seemed to think that the *bhasha* writers have a quiet contempt for them and do not think highly of their literary achievements. A friend Saleem Peeradina put it more succinctly and honestly when he said that *bhasha* writers are envious of the money, fame, and reach of those writing in English who have access to anglophone media, which in turn are severely deficient in knowledge of *bhasha* writers.

It was a gathering of writers genuinely interested in finding out their place in the hierarchy of world writers. I was touched by their honesty and their anxiety, but at the same felt like a ringside spectator. I understood their concerns but sadly could not share them. "This happens when you leave home," I thought, like a provincial uncle. "But what about those who live in India and prefer to write in English?" the eternal other one in

me, more urban, asked. One meets these English-language writers often, some of them dear friends, and can find them getting angry over the fact that *bhasha* writers do not consider them writers worthy of any cognizance. Some of them do sincerely believe that this refusal to accept them stems from envy.

Most of these allegations are not exactly untrue or baseless. *Bhasha* writers do tend to react to their brothers' and sisters' writing with scant attention. They either dismiss it superciliously as "second-rate stuff" or question the very integrity of the writers themselves ("they cater to the West for money, fame etc."), which I think is not only unjust but also downright uncivilized. Nobody has any business to decide what language one should choose for self-expression. I personally have no problems with my friends' writing in English. I realized long ago that there is a group of people (albeit a minuscule minority, living mostly in metropolises in India) who use English as their mother tongue, and all their social and familial interactions are in English. They are Indians who just happen to use this particular language. If they are comfortable with the language, why shouldn't they write in it? I would do so, had I had the same command over the language and facility of expression in it. This, Indians writing in English, is an Indian reality which we must learn to accept alongside all the other Indian realities. (The great N.R Bendre was a Maharashtrian who chose to write, not in Marathi, but in Kannad. And, rightly enough, nobody questions Mr Bendre's credentials.) These realities coexist, overlap, run in parallel, and sometime clash. But they are all Indian realities creating a mosaic of one large Indian Reality. Creating a hierarchy among these and then being judgmental about each one is both wrong and futile.

But to accuse all *bhasha* writers of being a jealous lot is too defensive a reaction. I am personally – and I know quite a few other *bhasha* writers who think the same – not a bit envious of their money and fame. Most of us accepted long ago that we will never be rich. (My income tax returns are a source of embarrassment to my chartered accountant.) I am a lucky writer if I am able to sell hundred copies of my book a year. What's the percentage of literacy in India, and how many of the literate love literature passionately enough to buy a book? We have learnt to be pragmatic about it. We don't even think of money. Or fame. The size of our fame is smaller, to be sure, than the size of fame of our Indian colleagues writing in English. But our reputations are more solid because they are grounded

in a language spoken by a large number of people with whom we literally rub shoulders every day: we live in the midst of them and interact with them, share with them a common sensibility, history, legends, concerns – while writers in India who write in English do not have this advantage. They perhaps miss the immediacy of a language bond, a shared sensibility, and consequently they are deprived of a large readership in India.

As a personal aside, why should I read English 'stuff' written by an unknown entity when I can easily lay my hands on a G.A. Kulkarni or a Vinda Karandikar who have written superb things in Marathi? And every day sees the arrival of fresh new talent of wonderful promise. I did my postgraduate work in English literature and taught it at university level for thirty-five years, but I do not think in English. I think, feel, dream, eat, sleep in Marathi, and English remains an alien language to me even now. Most of us do not feel an emotional bond with English – a prerequisite for a loyal readership. What can one do in such a situation?

My anglophone colleagues are at a disadvantage here. We, *bhasha* writers, live and work in a sharply defined linguistic and geographical space, whereas English writers do not enjoy such a space in India. Our relationship with our readers is more secure because we are talking to a homogeneous lot among whom we live, while anglophone writers are read by a minority scattered all over the country. I wonder if anglophone writers can have a 'shared code', as Shashi Deshpande puts it, between them and their readers, a code that regional-language writers take for granted.

And perhaps (with a few exceptions, of course) anglophone writers fail to command a readership in the West as well? Is it these writers who keep complaining that they are getting a raw deal in terms of readership and recognition? Perhaps they are not very good writers? But the same fate awaits the *bhasha* writers as well when they are not very good. And they, too, complain. One meets almost everyday a (bad) writer from Marathwada or Vidarbha complaining about being marginalized and ignored by Western Maharashtra (Mumbai and Pune, to be specific), which is the center of Marathi literary activity. He forgets that really good writers from these very regions have been unconditionally accepted, lionized, and showered with praise by the same Western Maharashtra. Psychology of frustrated writers? Only the scale changes. I have a suspicion (forgive me if I am rubbing them the wrong way) that some of my anglophone colleagues do not really care a hoot for any recognition that might come from

Indian readers. They want it from the Western Establishment, and when it does not come, they begin to find fault with Indian readership. Don't they understand that we do not relate to English, the language they have chosen to express themselves in, on a creative level?

But I understand their predicament. And I would like to tell them that I do not think there is anything wrong in wanting recognition from the West. I would want it if it were possible. It is a perfectly legitimate desire. They are writing in a language which has a long literary tradition in the West and not in India. They are perfectly justified in wanting recognition from the West. Why feel guilty about it? It is also perfectly correct to set their sights on a Western readership. They are, after all, writing in a language spoken by the Western world and not by many Indians (two percent at a pinch?). But let's face it: they will never be so fully appreciated and accepted in India as *bhasha* writers are, because all the *bhashas* here, many of them older than English, have formidable literary histories and they are still a vital, dynamic force in our lives.

English is an acquired language, and it can never enjoy the same emotional bond with us the way any *bhasha* can. We do need English for practical purposes, but our *bhashas* are perfectly capable of fulfilling our emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs. English for most of us remains an alien language; sorry. The writers writing in English should ignore what Indian readers say about them. If they want large reputations, a perfectly legitimate aspiration, these will never be made here, for the simple reason that they have a small readership in India. Why do they want to have their cake and eat it too? Most *bhasha* writers have (very unwillingly) come to terms with the fact that they will never be known in the glamorous West, will never have book launches in five-star establishments with film stars flown in for the occasion, will never appear in the glitzy Sunday supplements of national dailies. It is another world, different from ours, very remote from us culturally and emotionally; and we are not, cannot be, part of it, for a variety of reasons. Very few *bhasha* writers can manage to shuttle comfortably between these two worlds.

Having said that, the studied indifference of 'the other world' deserves criticism. Vinda Karandikar gets the most prestigious Dnyanpeeth award, the highest in India, and (it is reported) a most widely read national daily had to be actually coerced into flashing a small news item about him. ("But he writes in Marathi!" – such exasperated contempt injected into the exclamation. I haven't heard of the Government of India passing a bill

that stops English media from giving coverage to *bhasha* writers.) A fledgling anglophone writer is given full treatment by the English media: interviews, color photographs of the writer in designer clothes (against the backdrop of Marine Drive. Naturally. Where do you think he lives, Ambejogai?), write-ups and so forth. Works. They make it really quite enticing for people who want to shop at the literary supermarket.

This blatantly partial and vulgar attitude on the part of the English press leaves me aghast. This attitude is stupefying, to say the least. Who are these people? Aren't they Indians, living in India, publishing a paper for a readership which is Indian? The English media have largely been responsible for alienating *bhasha* writers from their anglophone brothers in a big way. They have played a major role in creating 'them' and 'us' polarities. Fortunately, the anglophone writers, or a good number of them, are not only aware of this fact but also deplore it, and I personally know many who have tremendous interest in and respect for regional-language writing. Media play the villain and their supercilious attitude towards *bhasha* writing should be condemned in no uncertain terms. Why do these people do it? I think they live in a vacuum, are in a sort of self-induced reverie, clinging to a dream world of the colonial past. They are determinedly remote from the *desi* reality in an effort to maintain their 'superior' status (only insecure people would do that, don't you think?), are so cut off that I have known of an editor of a national daily who thought "Vidarbha" was the name of a town. Their India begins and ends in South Bombay ("not Mumbai, for God's sake!"). It is pathetic. Use a stronger word if you know one.

The reason for this bias is simple. Marathi (or any other Indian language, for that matter), although spoken by eighty million people, is, like all Indian languages, an unimportant language in the world order. *Bhashas* remain unimportant not because literature of any merit is not produced in them. They are unimportant because the people who speak them are unimportant. A language is taken notice of when the people who speak it are noticed, and they are noticed when they are a military and monetary power. It is simple politics. A few *bhasha* writers have realized this and have come to terms with it. *C'est la vie*. There is no other way of looking at it if you want to get rid of that heart-burn. Secondly, most of us shook off the colonial hang-up long ago. In fact, it, both the word and the sentiment, is completely *passé*. It hardly matters whether the West takes cognizance of us or not. We are too confident of our Indianness, too secure in it

to bother about appreciation coming from the West. If it does, well and good; it's a fringe benefit. Nothing more, nothing less. And money, of course. A little bit of that would help.

Most of us do not begrudge the anglophone writers their royalties and international fame. But what can make *bhasha* writers acrimonious and spiteful is the 'attitude' of the writers in English. They, even the one-book non-entities among them, trot all over the world as cultural ambassadors of India while this honor should at least occasionally be accorded to some more knowledgeable, more worthy *bhasha* writer. Not only that: they make categorical remarks about *bhasha* writing when many of them are really not familiar with it. I admit that there are some honorable exceptions. But a Rushdie or a Naipaul has no business to be so contemptuously dismissive of Indian *bhasha* writing. It is not even polite. What do they know of Indian languages? How many *bhashas* do they speak, read or write, that they can dump their literatures so arrogantly and confidently?

For instance, think of what happened in Nimrana.[1] Funnily enough (but not surprisingly), most of the Indian writers who were invited to this glittering occasion were people who write in English. Even a one-book young anglophone writer was invited while *bhasha* writers in the gathering could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Talk of a colonial hang-up! We writers may have shaken it off, but the Indian establishment obviously hasn't. What made it worse was that the Indian-English writers took these remarks lying down; not one of them had enough pride in their 'native' colleagues to stand by them and the courage to ask these luminaries if they had read anything from Kannad or Bangla or Marathi in the original. I admire friend Ruchir Joshi for exploding at Sir Vidia's rudeness. But he did not feel the need to stand up for Indian-language writing in the moment that such ignorant and irresponsible remarks were being made. That hurt. The remarks of Sir Vidia were unexpected, although not exactly surprising, knowing Naipaul.[2] Yet it matters little what he said, because he

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[1] The 2002 "At Home in the World" conference organized by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations discussed in the Introduction of this volume.

[2] Editors' Note: V.S. Naipaul, in his keynote address at the "At Home in the World" conference, said the following:

> The Prime Minister spoke very movingly about Indian writing in Indian languages and the difficulty and fairness for those writers. But in a way we cannot do much about that. Writing depends on readership. And if in those languages, shall we say Marathi or whatever,

does not exist even on the periphery of our lives. But the silence of my anglophone colleagues hurt. Was it because they were tacitly in agreement with Naipaul?

It is on such occasions that *bhasha* writers feel they are getting a raw deal, are being looked down upon. And, at the end of the day, who are Naipaul or Rushdie to us? If, at all, I have to find spiritual nourishment in Western thought, I would rather go to T.S. Eliot or Graham Greene than to Naipaul or Rushdie, whom I regard as overrated. *Midnight's Children* is a wonderful novel, but post-*Midnight's Children* Rushdie is unbearable.[3] Give me classics. Always. Who has the time to experiment with modern writers? (Reading Tukaram or Dnyaneshwar is a lifetime vocation; it could leave no room for anything else.) There is so much to read from my own language, and from other Indian languages made accessible to me because of some good translations. Twenty-two major Indian languages! And most Indians are comfortably familiar with at least two or three of them at a time.

Of course, when I say there is a lot to read in my own language, I do not mean to say that everything written in it is superlative or even good. Most writing in it, as in any other language in the world (including English), is bad. One comes across a startlingly genuine work only once in a while. And great books are even rarer to come by. It is so with English as well, don't you think? But I, as a *bhasha* person, have a choice. I do not have to read bad English books, while I make it a point to read even bad *bhasha* books occasionally to feel the pulse of my language and gauge the status of my people's health. It is a concern and involvement I do not feel for English.

Bhasha writers who get upset about the mind-boggling royalties and advances, press notices and Bookers that anglophone writers get should rejoice in the fact that it is Indians who are getting them. It is easier said than done, I know. A bit too noble to practice. But one way out of this unpleasant situation is to have good translations of important *bhasha* works in English. What we need is a band of dedicated and professional trans-

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> there was a sufficiently large readership, the books if they were great enough, would have made an impression.

– *At Home in the World*, ed. K. Satchidanandan et al. (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2005): 11–12.

[3] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981).

lators. They should be paid high fees respectfully and given due credit for their work. An expanded infrastructure that supports this activity as an important literary mission should be created. It is only then that we shall be able to find out whether *bhasha* writers can hold a candle to our anglophone brothers and sisters and their Western peers and whether their complaints about being marginalized in the global context are justified. If they are any good, they will make their presence felt – not as *bhasha* writers but as Indian writers. After all, there are any number of Márquezes and Lorcas and Strindbergs and Kunderas available to us in translations. Let us see, once and for all, if our *bhasha* writers can command the same respect and popularity in the West as their European colleagues. If they are good, they will get the recognition they crave. If they are not, they will be silenced for good. End of acrimony.

The issue of translations of *bhasha* writing is a dicey game, though. One Indian language lends itself easily to translation into any other Indian language because of shared ethos, history and culture (as most European languages get translated in English quite easily for the same reasons). It is not so when *bhasha* writing is translated into English. The cultural specifics remain untranslatable. This is where the translator feels defeated. Haven't we read many original Indian-English works where the writers (at least previously) used to be explanatory, expansive, piling detail upon detail? The writers of these works were accused of "setting their eyes on the West," and their literature was called "India-made-easy" stuff. I would not like to be so uncharitable. It is very difficult to write in English about certain things Indian. And a writer unfailingly tends to overwrite when he is not secure in his material and ends up writing boringly lengthy passages. ("Get on with it. I know all these things" is the impatient reaction of a *bhasha* reader.) This is a fact all writers know. Translations of even great works can be frighteningly boring. This happens when English works are translated into *bhashas*, too. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*[4] was translated into Marathi by a celebrated Marathi writer. It weighed about a kilogram, while just about fifty grams of it were readable. It sounded flat and jejune. (I read the novel in English later on and did not feel the need to change my opinion. Jane Austen! Where is the Vikram Seth of *The Golden Gate*?[5] The celebrated writer is reported to have said, after the

[4] Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).
[5] Vikram Seth, *The Golden Gate* (New York: Vintage, 1991).

Hindi translation of the same was published, that the novel had gone back to its home. I wonder. It hasn't exactly created any ripples in the Hindi belt, for your information. Such an unimpressive homecoming. Give us *Raag Darbari*[6] in its place. Any day. And let me read *A Suitable Boy* in English only, please. It makes for a slightly better reading in that language.)

Situations like these, of translations with mixed results, are bound to arise. We must accept the fact that there are two distinctly different sensibilities at work here, that there is something like an Indian response to life, situations, people which differs from the Western response to these, and then it will be easier for us to accept both the literatures. Clearly, anglophone colleagues have an easy relationship with the Western response to life and literature and are closer to it because of their Western education, their broad exposure to English (and perhaps European languages), and their more cosmopolitan lives. *Bhasha* writers have to learn to accept these differences graciously and do so without making any value judgment. That the anglophone writers have different sensibilities does not stop them from being Indian writers.

Another hurdle in the translation business is that certain texts from *bhasha* literatures remain absolutely untranslatable. Grace's poetry can easily be compared to Rimbaud's. It has that class. Yet it remains unknown outside even of Maharashtra because every word in any of his poems is charged with infinite sensory appeal. The very sound of his words and their textures creates an ambiance that cannot be recaptured even in any Indian language, forget about English. Here is an instance of form becoming content. Along with this, his work is deeply rooted in quintessentially Marathi legends and myths that lend his poetry a strangely indefinable, evocative quality that is difficult to re-create in any other language. What does one do in such a situation? Only one thing. Don't bother to translate. Anyone interested will have to learn Marathi.

Even among the anglophone writers, there are acrimonious divides: resident Indian-English writers, Indian-English writers who live abroad (diasporic – a bright new medal some seem to pin on the lapels of their jackets; until two years ago I did not even know what the word meant, such is my ignorance), first-generation Indians living abroad vs. second-generation anglophones published by Indian publishers and those who are

[6] Sri Lal Shukla, *Raag Darbari*, tr. Gillian Wright (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992).

lucky enough to be published by publishers from abroad. It is endless. Whatever language we may use, Indians cannot live without a caste system. It can be hilarious. If you are not a part of it, that is. Not exactly my scene.

When all is said and done, it is ultimately a power game played to assert supremacy, a matter of egos clashing. Who is better than whom, who gets fatter royalties, greater fame, more acceptance from the West. Are we, both *bhasha* writers as well as anglophone writers, going to assess the success of our work by these parameters? Are these external and incidental factors going to determine the worth of our writing? It is dangerous to fall in this trap.

Most often a writer who chooses to write *only* for his people remains unnoticed by a larger community of people even if he is writing outstanding literature. But aren't we, in the final analysis, writing mainly for a particular audience/reader? If we know and decide who our readers are, much of the debate will be diffused. Once that is settled, why would a writer expect recognition and adulation from people who are decisively *not* his readers? All writers need readers with whom we interact on a daily basis and with whom we are umbilically connected. And the only way to truly succeed in striking this kind of *rishta* with one's readers is to be local. Only the truly local can be universal. Who could be more local than Chekhov and yet so universal? And, of course, he never wrote in English.

Postscript

Just as I was just finishing writing this article in the early hours of the morning, there came the news of Kiran Desai winning the Booker.[7] *Someone living across from my house burst a couple of rounds of his pre-Diwali crackers and waved at me. The phone rang excitedly a few times more than usual. There was jubilation in the air. An hour later, I was reading an extremely laudatory and proud editorial on Ms. Desai in the* Maharashtra Times*, a major Marathi daily published from Mumbai.*

[7] Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (New York: Atlantic Monthly P, 2006).

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The Last Fifty Years

A Retrospective on the Calcutta Writers Workshop[1]

PRADIP SEN

RECENTLY I READ AN ARTICLE ON CALCUTTA – what it was fifty years ago and how it has been transformed into Kolkatta, virtually another city. Whereas Calcutta was cosmopolitan, Kolkatta is predominantly Bengali, a product of the older city, a city that no longer exits except in the mind. I grew up in the 1940s and was twenty-one when India became independent. Growing up in the 1940s in a city ravaged by war, famine, and partition was a searing experience.

Our upbringing was cosmopolitan and reflected the city where Bengalis, Armenians, Jews, Anglo-Indians, Britishers, Europeans, Asians, and Indians from all parts of the country lived, loved, and made a living. Schooled in a Jesuit institution where almost all nationalities were represented, we were proud of our city. I say this advisedly, as over the years I have come to believe that a city plays a more important role in shaping our sensibilities than is usually recognized, more so than country, nation

[1] The Calcutta Writers Workshop was founded in 1958 under the leadership of Professor P. Lal. It has published over 4,000 titles in the last fifty years, has played a very important role in the development of Indian English writing, and has been the first to publish many world-renowned Indian writers. The Workshop also has become known for its exquisite production: the books are published on hand operated presses and bound in elegant sari fabric. The Writers Workshop operates as an alternative publishing house and avoids commercialism, as Professor Lal describes on their website. They publish serious creative writing "because there is no satisfactory distribution network for such writing." P. Lal, "Writers Workshop – A Credo" (http://www.writers workshopindia.com/home.html)

or province. I am, of course, speaking as an urban Indian, who has virtually no roots in rural India.

The recent spate of novels on Mumbai lends emphasis to the point I am trying to make. Amidst much talk of multiple identities, Bapsi Sidhwa made three significant statements in an interview reported in the July 2006 issue of the *Journal of Indian Writing in English*. First, she refers to Lahore as her city in talking about her new book *City of Sin and Splendor: Writings on Lahore*. Secondly, she goes on to say,

> I am first of all a Parsi, then I am Punjabi, then I am Pakistani and Indian, because I have been a citizen of India, also Bombay is my home. That's where all the Parsis live. So I define myself as all these. And now I am living in America. For me now, borders have become meaning less….

Finally, on the question of moorings, she sums up by saying:

> I am always going to be moored in the sub-continent because even if I write of America, for example in 'An American Brat,' half of the novel is set in Lahore. What you are most familiar with, the land of your birth, the land of your youth and adulthood, all that becomes yours. That is my moorings.[2]

Having lived away from Calcutta for almost forty years, I would still say I am a Calcuttan, the product of a city that no longer exists except in memory. Most Calcutta Writers Workshop members of my time would, I think, tend to agree. However, I am anticipating events. In the late 1950s, frustrated by a lack of publishing outlets and convinced that English was the language for our creative efforts, a few of us joined P. Lal, a young professor of English, to form the Writers Workshop, Calcutta, in 1958.

In the 1950s, this was regarded as an aberration, a passing phase, a colonial hang-up. In some quarters, creative writing in English bordered on a lack of patriotism. Lal and Raghavendra Rao had jointly edited an anthology of Indo-Anglian verse.[3] In my view, this constituted a water-

[2] Bapsi Sidhwa, in Banibrata Mahanta, "Interview with Bapsi Sidhwa," *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 34.2 (July 2006): 49–53.

[3] *Modern Indian Poetry*, ed. P. Lal & K. Raghavendra Rao (New Delhi: Kavita, 1959). Lal also published *Modern Indian Poetry in English: The Writers Workshop Selection*, ed. P. Lal (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1969).

shed in the history of Indo-Anglian writing and created quite an impact. It led to the workshop's formulating its manifesto on the role of Indian writing in English and to a controversy with Buddhadeva Bose and Jyotirmay Datta, leading figures of the Bengali literary establishment.[4] They were supported by some British writers, among them the late Stephen Spender, who felt that Indian writing in English, especially poetry, was bound to be derivative, inferior, and, at best, a short-lived phenomenon.

I recall a conversation with Spender in the Haymarket offices of *Encounter* in London in 1962. He was kind and cordial but frankly skeptical about someone aspiring to write poetry in English unless he or she was exposed and accustomed, as he put it, to the Cockney twang of the London cabbie. Dom Moraes was an exception. How times have changed – not to speak of the London cab driver.

In the 1950s there were a few outlets for our creative effusions – the *Illustrated Weekly* of Bombay being one of them. Its editor, C.R. Mandy, was supportive but whimsical. *Quest* was a magazine devoted to art and literature and Nissim Ezekiel was its editor for a time. *Thought*, a weekly edited by Ram Singh from Delhi, and *East–West*, edited by Srinivas Rayaprol from Hyderabad, were among a few others.

Lal changed all that. Starting with a few slender paperback volumes and a bimonthly journal, *The Miscellany*, the Writers Workshop now has almost four thousand titles to its credit; its beautiful sari-clad volumes and calligraphic titles are well-known and have created a niche for themselves. Many famous names have appeared under its imprint; among them, Ruskin Bond, Anita Desai, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Pritish Nandy, Shashi Deshpande, Vikram Seth, Jayantha Mahapatra, Jai Ratan, P. Lal, Keki Daruwala, Shiv K. Kumar, Jug Suraiya, Sashti Brata, and Asif Currumbhoy come to mind.

Apart from Lal there were seven founder-members – Jai Ratan, Deb Kumar Das, Anita Desai, William Hull, Sashi Brata, Kewlian Sio, and myself. We used to meet every Sunday morning at Lal's suburban residence at Lake Gardens, then a quiet residential area with lots of trees. (Sadly, it has now become quite crowded.) These meetings were eagerly looked forward to and a rare delight. Apart from us, there were several

[4] Editors' note: see Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's "Introduction" to *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia UP, 2003): 15–17.

other regulars – among them, the late David McCutchion, a staunch Leavisite a well as an authority on the terracotta temples of Bengal. McCutchion, a Cambridge man who had studied under F.R. Leavis, was at the time teaching English at Jadavpur University. He subjected our efforts to a searching scrutiny but tempered his criticism with wit and wisdom. His life ended tragically in 1972 when he contracted meningitis on a field trip to Orissa, where he had gone to inspect and record terracotta temples. He was only forty-one.

These Sunday sessions were marked by stimulating discussion, clinical dissection of manuscripts, and the planning of forthcoming publications, including the *Miscellany*, the Workshop journal (the early numbers are now collectors' items). And the sessions were interspersed with delectable sweets, *singharas*, and endless cups of tea provided unobtrusively by Kisha, Lal's charming and gracious wife, who is an author in her own right and has collaborated with Lal in translating some of Tagore's work.

There were several distinguished visitors from time to time. They included Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Pearl Buck, Günter Grass, Karl Shapiro, Stephen Spender, Nirad Chaudhuri, Christopher Isherwood, Karan Singh, Allen Ginsberg, Raja Rao, Paul Engle, James Laughlin, Bonnie Crown, J.B.S. Haldane, Ved Mehta. In addition, we had visits from reputed Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil and other *bhasha* writers.

There is a tendency in some quarters to categorize Indian writing in English as urban and middle-class, thereby suggesting that it is out of touch with ground realities and with the 'real' India, which is rural, regional, and local. No doubt we were an urban, middle-class group united in the belief that we had something to say and that we could best say it in English. This did not make us less Indian or less in touch with reality. In the early days there were several debates and discussions on the future of Indian writing in English, on why we wrote in English, and so forth. Some of these topics figure in the issues of the *Miscellany*. In re-reading the records of many a symposium, some seem somewhat dated, but many subjects are still relevant.[5] Two major preoccupations, both then

[5] See, for example, the forum discussions in *The Miscellany* 2 (October 1960), 3 (December 1960), and 4 (January–February 1961). These discussants included the author, David McCutchion, Anita Desai and others and were on such topics as "Can there be such a thing as Indian Poetry" (*The Miscellany* 2) and "Is there any 'World View' or set of beliefs in India which, if embodied in creative writing, would give a

and now, that have dominated discussions on Indian writing in English continue to center on authenticity and Indianness. These two issues are often clubbed together. To my mind this is a misnomer. For example, I do not see why Mahashweta Devi's writing is more authentic when she writes on tribal India than Anita Desai's in *Baumgartner's Bombay*.[6] There is also an underlying suggestion that rural India is more real/authentic than urban India. Therefore, Mahasweta Devi, a non-tribal, regional writer dealing with tribals is ostensibly more authentic than Anita Desai writing about urban middle-class Bombay.

Questions of Indianness have dogged Indian writing in English for over fifty years and have done more harm than good. There is always an underlying suggestion that *bhasha* writing is more authentic, more 'Indian'. While language and literature are linked, they should not be confused with nation or nationality. In fact, the search for Indianness is irrelevant and should be discarded. It has no place in judging literature or assessing literary merit. The link between language and literature is nowhere more evident than in Bengali – Tagore being equally revered in West Bengal and in Bangladesh, regardless of nationality. In fact, there are several Bengali writers held in common esteem on both sides of the border, including Jibananda Das, Nazrul Islam, and Taslima Nasrin; but Tagore remains an iconic figure.

Apart from authenticity and nationality, the hostility between *bhasha* writing and Indian writing in English seems to be dependent on the publishing world. If publishers would only encourage and finance translations/transcreations from *bhasha*/regional writing into English and vice-versa as well as from one *bhasha* into another, whole new markets could emerge. But what one needs is a competent body of translators. Here the role of the Indian writer in English could be a constrictive one – many of them are bilingual only up to a point. For instance, in Bengali, there is a gulf between the spoken and the written tongue, much more so than in English. Written Bengali is much more sanskritized than the spoken tongue. This means that an anglophone Bengali writer may be capable of speaking Bengali but unable to write it. This is so in my case and may well be true of others. A similar situation may exist in other

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reader the impression that he has experienced something unmistakably Indian?" (*The Miscellany* 4).

[6] Anita Desai, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988; New York: Penguin, 1989).

bhasha languages. What if collaboration could be arranged between *bhasha* writers and 'English' writers? This could lead to familiarity with each others' work and enrich literature in general. Or am I entertaining an illusion? It would be unfair to assume that *bhasha* writers and writers in English are wholly isolated from each other. I am told, for instance, that Amitav Ghosh is in touch with contemporary Bengali writers and that they discuss each others' work.

In this context, I must mention the name of Sivasankari, a Tamilian woman writer from Chennai who is committed to the cause of bringing *bhasha* writing from all parts of India to the English-speaking and Tamil world. She calls her project "Knit India" and has already published three volumes covering the South, West, and East of India. The remaining volume, on the North, is due to be published. When I spoke to her recently she appeared rather disappointed at the lack of support and general indifference. She has been working on the project since 1992 and her objective is to introduce Indians to other Indians and bring them closer through a knowledge of each others' literary heritage and culture. The quality of translation may not measure up to international standards but at least a beginning has been made. An interesting article on her appeared recently in the daily Chennai newspaper, *The Hindu*.[7] Her vision is to be admired. What one needs is support from the publishing world.

Here again the Workshop did pioneering work all those years ago. Lal blazed a new trail with his translations or transcreations. His major works include *Great Sanskrit Plays in New English Transcreations* (New Directions) and the *Mahabharata* (Writers Workshop),[8] ventures that required considerable scholarship, patience, and dedication. The late Robert Antoine SJ, a mutual friend, was a great help and support, which Lal gratefully acknowledged. Antoine, a Jesuit, a Sanskrit scholar, and professor of comparative literature at Jadavpur University, was a source of inspiration to many of us. His seminal work *Rama and the Bards*[9] was published

[7] Kausalya Santhanam, "Literary Odyssey," interview with Sivasankari, *The Hindu* (5 February 2006): http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/lr/2006/02/05/stories/2006020500160300.htm

[8] P. Lal, *Great Sanskrit Plays in New English Transcreations* (New York: New Directions, 1968), and P. Lal, *Mahabharata English: The Mahabharata Translated from Sanskrit of Vyasa* (Calcutta: Writers Workship, 1968).

[9] Robert Antoine, S.J., *Rama and the Bards: Epic Memory in the Ramayana* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1975).

under the Workshop imprint. Lal has continued to encourage translations from *bhasha* languages and many such works have appeared under the Workshop imprint.

Finally, reverting to the organic link between language and literature, I think the time has come to regard 'literature in English' in its own right and not divide it into Indo-Anglian literature, English literature, American literature, Commonwealth/postcolonial literature and so on. With globalization and the graduation of English to the status of a world language, such distinctions are no longer valid. The country of origin of a writer or his nationality should play no part in determining the quality of his literary work. There is a tendency to link *bhasha* writing inextricably with Indianness and authenticity. In my view, this is misleading and futile. What is more, setting authenticity up as a literary criterion is unwarranted.

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A South Asian American Writer's Perspective

An Interview with Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni[1]

NINA SWAMIDOSS MCCONIGLEY

NINA MCCONIGLEY: Who have been your primary influences?

CHITRA DIVAKARUNI: They keep changing – from contemporary writers to old Indian epics. Many women's voices – from Mahasweta Devi writing in Bengali to Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee in English. Maxine Hong Kingston; my colleague, Antonya Nelson; Chimamanda Adichie, Zadie Smith, Rikki Ducornet. I read as many South Asian writers as I can find. I'm sure they all influence me on some level, although it doesn't mean my writing is like theirs, or even that we are trying to do the same thing.

Who do you imagine your audience to be and/or who are you most trying to reach?

Anyone who wants to give my books their attention. I don't think beyond that any more.

Did you ever consider writing in a language other than English?

Briefly, in Bengali, but I don't have the depth of knowledge or expertise or extended vocabulary. I can read fluently, though, and can translate from Bengali. In fact, I also help when my own works are translated into Bengali.

[1] This interview was conducted in several stages via e-correspondence.

How many of your books have been translated into Bengali and what are some challenges/opportunities that you may have encountered during the supervision of your translations? How have your Bengali readers received these translations?

Conch Bearer has been translated. A number of stories from *Arranged Marriage,* too. The translators have been very cooperative. If I disagreed or had suggestions, we've discussed them and most often incorporated them. Currently *Sister of My Heart* is being translated. The response has been very positive from everything I've heard.

Have you ever received criticism for writing mainly in English (as, for instance, Shashi Deshpande has), or has your country of residence served to block that sort of criticism?

Every once in a while people will comment on it, but not with too much vehemence. I think people are beginning to realize that most writers generally write in the language they are most at ease with, and for most people it isn't a choice. (It's not as though we say "Oh, now I'll write in English or German or French because it's more prestigious.") It's not as though I could do a good job writing in Bangla even if I wanted to. My education shaped me in this manner long before I became a writer.

Several writers of the South Asian diaspora have been criticized for being inauthentic and pandering to the West. In fact, you, specifically, have received mixed reviews from the Indian press. How do you respond to such charges?

I write what I'm interested in: the magical, the immigrant life, and women's issues. I write them as truly as I know. I feel that my realistic fiction (stories from *Arranged Marriage* and *Unknown Errors, Sister of My Heart, Vine of Desire*, etc.) is authentic and close to the life of Bengali women as I have known it – and is in fact filled with real-life detail. My magical books – *Mistress of Spices* and *Queen of Dreams* – need to be looked at differently. They inhabit the world of the tale and are fantastic in nature. As such, they are close in intention to the works of writers like Isabel Allende, Gabriel García Márquez, and many other Latin American writers. And like them they have a political aspect – *Mistress* deals with a number of problems faced by the immigrant community, and *Queen* deals in particular with the hate-crimes following 9/11. They are set in an actual

geographical setting in the west (Northern California) which is made magical by the presence of certain characters who see/interact with the world in certain ways.

Critics sometimes only look at the very surface elements – spices, or dream interpretation, or the ability to speak to animals – and call these elements exotic. But I'm trying to do something quite different – combining twenty-first-century experience with an ancient folk/fairy-tale tradition from Bengal to create (I hope) an original kind of fiction. Ultimately, the conflict lies in the fact that certain critics (and I'm talking about Western critics as well as Indian) see the magical as exotic and I do not. I believe that there are many levels of human experience and the magical (or beyond the world available to the senses) way is a valid and subtle one. What can that have to do with the East or the West?

Has criticism from your Western readers or Western diasporic readers been different in content or tone than from the Indian press (English-language press or otherwise)?

In some cases, yes. Some critics have felt that my language is too lush (too Indian?!). Sometimes they're troubled by what they consider the overly emotional treatment of characters. (I think this is something I've learned from Bengali writers such as Tagore, Sharat Chandra, Ashapurna Devi, etc.) But, as I mentioned above, sometimes Western critics have also had problems with the magical in my novel. It depends on what their literary sensibilities are.

What do you think about the anglophone domination of Indian letters?

I don't think anglophone writing dominates. There's a huge and rich body of Bangla literature being written today – writers like Sunil Gangopadhyay are *huge* in India, and I'm sure it's the same with other Indian languages. Readers in the West who don't have access to those languages may not realize this.

English literature often dominates because of the economic backing of Western prizes and the marketing resources of Western publishing houses, let alone the money that citizen-readers have for spending on books in different countries. Perhaps that is why some of your colleagues, for instance, Mahesh Elkunchwar, a Marathi playwright, writes:

> *We do not resent the anglophone writers their royalties and International fame. But what angers the* bhasha *writers, makes them acrimonious and spiteful is the 'attitude' of the writers in English. They, even one book nonentities from among them, trot all over the world as cultural ambassadors of India while this honour should at least occasionally be accorded to some more knowledgeable, more worthy* bhasha *writer. Not only that, they make categorical remarks about* bhasha *writing when most often many of them are really not familiar with it.*[2]

Given the predominance of English language Indian writing being available to Western audiences, how might bhasha *writing (vernacular writing) be made accessible in the West? In other words, why are major* bhasha *writers, Sunil Gangopadhyay for instance, not available to Western audiences?*

Elkunchwar has a point, certainly (though I think he makes some sweeping generalizations about "attitudes"). I think more translation projects – and the support of translated books – would be a good place to start. Gayatri Spivak is doing a great job with this. In a much more modest way, I teach *Truth Tales*.[3] I also teach Tagore's novels and some of Mahasweta Devi's stories. I've participated in some poetry translation anthologies (mostly through university presses). I translated and published a story by Sunil Gangopadhyay some years back in the *Chicago Review*[4] (but haven't been able to interest a major publisher in his novels). My feeling is that the larger commercial publishers are not very interested in translations at this time – it's not yet part of the publishing culture (as opposed to, say, some European countries as well as England). And that's something to keep in mind – some of the European presses (surely they should be included when we speak of the Western audiences) are publishing translations of Indian works (Draupadi and Fischer in Germany, for instance; Ordfront and Tannan in Sweden).

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[2] In the present volume, p. 82.

[3] *Truth Tales: Contemporary Stories by Indian Women Writers*, ed. Kali for Women, Laura Kalpakian, intro. Meena Alexander (New York: Feminist Press, 1990).

[4] See Sunil Gangopadhyay, "The Most Beautiful Picture in the World," tr. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Chicago Review* 38.1–2 (1992): 61–66.

If you would like a more South Asian audience, have you considered helping to facilitate the translation of your works into Hindi and Tamil, for instance?

I'm always trying to get my works translated. I help with the Bangla part. I don't have a lot of connections in India, since I live here [in the USA]. But I've generally given permission (for free) to anyone who wants to translate and publish. A lot of short stories have come out recently – I recall several Kannada and Marathi translations. Just recently I gave permission for "The Bats" to be published in the Telugu e-magazine *Eenadu*.

You teach as well as write. I know you have taught the book Truth Tales: Contemporary Stories by Women Writers of India *edited by Laura Kalpakian and Meena Alexander. Why? How is the book received by Western students? Do you feel a responsibility to teach Indian writers not writing in English?*

First of all, I like the literary quality of that book. That's why I chose it, not for political reasons. I think the writing is fine, and I want to expose my students to new voices, new ways of storytelling. My students have responded to it very positively and learned a lot from it. I want them to break away from the Western 'workshop' story. Yes, I want them to learn from Indian writers writing in other languages and modes. But also I teach Japanese writers, Indonesian writers, South American writers, and Egyptian writers, many in translation.

Is this book being taught in a creative writing class – what kind of class do you teach this book?

I teach it in creative writing as well as a graduate seminar titled "India in the Writer's Eye." (Also, in my independent study courses, I encourage students to translate from their mother tongues as a writing project – I am fortunate to have several bilingual students – it teaches them so much about the use of language, makes them use English differently after that.)

What aspects of craft/aesthetics are different in these stories that give students a different insight into storytelling? How do you deal with the role of the translator in your classes?

This is a large topic – I'll deal with just one point – the arc of the story in many Indian stories is very different. Instead of the Freytag pyramid of

action rising to a climax and then a denouement, there's a sense of a life being looked at in all its fullness. The stories start and end at unusual points in the characters' lives.

We discuss the pros and cons of translating, the difficulties of bringing cultural issues into a whole different language/culture. The importance of being faithful to the original but also to creating a fine work. The biases that translators sometimes bring to works.

Do you read any other regional language authors either in English or in translation?

Yes, I read several people in English translation. I'm also interested in reading non-South Asian authors in translation.

Can you list a few examples of favorite translations?

Ismat Chughtai's work has been translated well. I like *Selected Writings*, translated by M. Asaduddin.[5] Premchand, too, has many translations. I like the one of *Godan* by P. Lal, along with Jai Ratan.[6] There's a good one that was published abroad: *Deliverance and other stories*, translated by David Rubin;[7] I have also enjoyed older texts like Kamala Subramaniam's *Mahabharat*.[8]

Given that you have said "to me, the art of dissolving boundaries is what living is all about,"[9] please elaborate on the role that translation literally and figuratively plays in your work.

Writing itself is translation, isn't it? – the translation of personal experience in a way that others will be able to understand and relate to. Beyond that, there's the translation of a region, a culture, a mindset, a history –

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[5] Ismat Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil: Selected Writings of Ismat Chughtai*, tr. M. Asaduddin (New York: Penguin, 2001).

[6] Premchand, *Godan: A Novel of Peasant India*, tr. Jai Ratan & P. Lal (Bombay: Jaico, 1979).

[7] Premchand, *Deliverance and Other Stories*, tr. David Rubin (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

[8] Kamala Subramaniam, *Mahabharata* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1990).

[9] See Elizabeth Softky, "Cross-cultural understanding spiced with the Indian Diaspora: Author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and her book 'The Mistress of Spices'," *Black Issues in Higher Education* (18 September 1997): 26–28.

writers deal with this all the time, even when writing in their mother tongue. I want my writing to be inclusive – and thus clear through context – so that my 84-year-old mother can enjoy it as well as my husband who is not Bengali as well as my friends, who may be from different countries and cultures. And readers whom I'll never know. I want them all to get something from my books. This doesn't mean the writing has to be watered down or explained. Readers understand a great deal intuitively, and there are today many ways of researching if you really want to find out about and understand culture.

Why do you think some Indian writers writing in English employ techniques such as magical realism, hybrid languages, or non-linear narratives in their prose? Do you think this is a way to subvert a more traditional form? I am thinking about your own work – books like The Conch Bearer *and* Mistress of Spices*.*

I think writers from many non-Western traditions do this. I think it's because those are old, honored, beloved ways of storytelling in their cultures. Perhaps it's subversive. Perhaps it's the desire to do something new and preserve something ancient at the same time. A lot of times we writers are just playing. That is an important dimension to art: playfulness, joy. Writing what we loved reading or hearing as children. Sometimes the critics want to give multisyllabic serious names to this impulse!

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II

Perspectives from the World of Publishing

India

The World of Publishing and Writing in 2007

URVASHI BUTALIA

I

EVERY YEAR, THE FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR, the biggest book fair in the world, focusses on one country as its Guest of Honor. In terms of the Frankfurt fair, this focus is a way of signaling that a country's publishing industry – and therefore its books and writers – have arrived in the international marketplace. Not only does this indicate that there is a wealth of talent to muster, but also that there is potential for markets to be generated. In 2006 India was the focus country at the Frankfurt Book Fair for the second time in twenty years (the first time was in 1986), the only country to have received such attention twice. However, while the 1986 focus on India may have been somewhat premature, in that Indian publishing has not really developed in the way it has today, the 2006 focus could not have been timelier. Much has changed for Indian publishers and writers in the past few years.

As publishers – small, independent, feminist – based in India, we have watched these developments with interest, excitement, and some concern. Interest, because we wonder where such international attention will take us; excitement, because the literature and writing that we have lived with, believed in, and nurtured is finally receiving the international attention that we have always known it deserved; and concern, because we cannot help wondering if this valorization of Indian writing (mostly Indian writing in English) is just another form of colonialism come back to haunt us. Let me try to explain.

Until a quarter century ago, the Indian book market, whether in English or in any of the eighteen official languages that India has, was largely dominated by educational books and textbooks. Books used for courses, or as supplementary readers, or those prescribed by universities, and books published for schools, made up more than eighty percent of the Indian book market. The general reader who read the general book – or what is known in publishing language as the trade book – was not someone publishers felt the need to nurture, and there was thus little encouragement for writers to produce general interest books. Advances were unheard of, book launches were a rarity, authors remained unsung, and reviews were noticeable by their absence. This wasn't necessarily true across the board – it is never easy to generalize in India – and some Indian languages could boast healthy markets for general books (for example, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi) and for authors who were cult figures, but this wasn't true of the English-language market. By and large, it wasn't unusual to walk into a bookshop – of which there were precious few, and mostly located in big cities – and find the shelves filled with trade books by foreign authors: Sidney Sheldons and Harold Robbinses rubbed shoulders with André Malraux and Doris Lessing.

And then, gradually, all this began to change. As always, it is difficult to put a precise time on when change begins to take place and when situations start to get transformed. Within the Indian book publishing industry, one of the factors responsible for the change was the devaluation of the rupee vis-à-vis the hard currencies of the dollar and the pound. Always a large – and economically stable – market for imported books, the Indian market began to change a little as the value of the rupee went down and the imported book (that came in mainly from the USA and the UK) became more expensive to bring in. The beginnings of market resistance to high prices of imported books set some publishers thinking about the possibility of developing a local publishing industry that focussed also on trade books. Roughly around the same time, a number of young professionals who had cut their teeth on the publishing industry and learnt on the job, began to move out of mainstream houses to set up on their own. Smaller, independent publishers made their tentative beginnings around this time – today, their names are well known all over the country (Sage, Roli Books, Kali for Women, Ravi Dayal, Stree, Katha, Tulika, Tara, Seagull and later, Permanent Black, Shrishti, Indialog, Yoda, Yatra, Zubaan, Women Unlimited and many more). The combination of a small

gap in the market because of the lesser availability of foreign books, and the energies and interests of younger publishers made for some changes in publishing; gradually, Indian books began to take their place on the shelves of bookshops, reducing, over time, the preponderance of foreign ones. This process was pushed along also because a number of larger houses such as Rupa, India Book House and others began to publish general-interest books, and when Penguin stepped in with an Indian office, things changed even more.

The good news, however, was restricted to books in English and it remained a constant source of tension for writers and publishers who worked in other Indian languages that their work remained somewhat invisible in what came to be seen as the mainstream. Thus, coverage of books in terms of reviews was mainly limited to English newspapers and magazines, Indian-language bookshops were hard to find, and authors writing in the Indian languages, no matter that their audiences were huge when compared with English reading audiences, were still seen as marginal. Despite significant changes in publishing, this tension has not gone away. English, spoken only by a fragment of India's population (the figure that is usually cited is 4–5 percent) still remains the language of power and privilege, and writers writing in English are seen as 'national' writers while, somehow, those writing in the Indian languages are still labeled 'regional' writers. Sometimes a regional writer may sell ten or twenty times more than an English writer, but the distinction remains. This has, not surprisingly, proved very galling for Indian-language writers, who, despite their stature in their language groups, are not given anywhere near the attention that English writers get, and, in mixed meetings, this can make for some fairly acrimonious interaction.

The tension, however, was – and remains – also a productive tension. Several of the new, independent publishers looked to relatively unexplored areas of publishing. Not only did they turn their attention to general books but over time they developed excellent lists in children's books, books by and about women, business books, computer books, translations and many more. The process of translation took the form of books from the Indian languages being translated into English – an activity that was not new, for organizations like the National Book Trust and the Sahitya Akademi (autonomous institutions working with government funds) had been publishing translations for some considerable time. But the business

of making translations marketable was something that publishers brought to the enterprise.

Important though this effort was, in the initial days it remained somewhat limited because, other than for some of the classics, India has not really developed in the field of translation. So much of the time, the quality of translations was mediocre and therefore not easily marketable. Over the years, however, this has begun to change – a market has begun to open up for translated works, not only from Indian languages to English but from one Indian language to another, and the quality of translations is beginning to improve. Just as the English publishing industry changed with the entry of a second generation of publishers who were willing to be more adventurous than their predecessors, so also the world of Indian-language publishing began to change when younger professionals inherited or took on the business. In Kerala, for example, Dee Cee Books moved into a new era of publishing with its takeover by its current owner, Rave Dee Cee, the son of the founder. In Tamil Nadu, another young son, Kannan, took over a Tamil publishing venture, Kalavachadu, set up by his writer–father Sundar Ramaswamy. In North India, a small Hindi publishing unit, Yatra, set up a collaboration with Penguin India, taking over several of their titles to publish in Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati. In Maharashtra, Mehta Publishing House began a venture to translate books from Indian languages and English into Marathi. While English still commands the biggest chunk of the market both in size and in terms of money, Indian-language publishing is now fast catching up, and this is evident during book fairs, where stands selling Indian language books are crowded out with people.

The 1990s also saw another major change in India, which had a considerable impact on Indian publishing. It was in the early 1990s that India began the process of opening up its economy to foreign capital. With the entry of globalization, the era of indigenous companies keeping majority shareholding in joint ventures gradually came to an end and foreign partners began to acquire larger stakes in businesses in India (Penguin India is a case in point). Economic change led to economic growth, and today India is spoken of as one of the rising economic giants of the world. With a large and wealthy middle class, it also offers a major market to industry from all over; and books are no exception.

II

What, then, does the future hold for small, independent publishers in India? Years ago, when we started Kali for Women, India's first feminist publishing house, we had several things in mind. The women's movement in India at the time was particularly strong, but nothing of what was going on inside the movement was reflected in the books that were being published. It was our belief that there was a market for books on and by women, and that as feminists, and publishers, it was incumbent upon us to explore this market and to make available books on and by women. We did this by publishing in a number of areas: research-based books on the social sciences and humanities that could contribute to creating a body of knowledge about women; general interest books that could help to expand the body of readers of work by and about women; pamphlets and small booklets for use by activists. While the initial steps were difficult – not least because the path at the time was untrodden – over time, Kali achieved some measure of success in bringing women's writing to centre stage and making it known.

Kali was not the only press doing something different. Many of the publishers mentioned above chose to walk a difficult path and succeeded. The market for children's books, for example, whether in English or any of the Indian languages (with the exception perhaps of Bengali), was dominated by boring, dull, moralistic books for children. Tulika and Tara publishers, between them, changed the face of children's book publishing in India, bringing in entertaining, colorful, serious, and exciting books. With a larger and more robust funding base than most of the smaller publishers, Roli books made a name for itself in the world of art books. Breaking with a family tradition, Full Circle books made a name for themselves in the world of new-age books. For many years, then, the Indian marketplace maintained the large, family publishing firm alongside the small independent and sometimes political firm and it seemed to be large enough to be able to accommodate these different kinds of publishers.

Will this now begin to change with the latest developments in Indian publishing? As India has globalized and opened up more and more to the international marketplace, Indian authors, especially those writing in English, have come to be better known internationally. For international publishers, then, India has become a desirable location, not only to source print services, which are cheaper than in many other places in the world,

but also to source writers, and, indeed, to service a growing market. The recent entry into India of some of the major international publishing houses such as Random House, HarperCollins, Hachette, and Scribner bears testimony to this. In this context, whether the small, independent publisher will survive is now a major question.

Small publishers have traditionally been strong on quality and personal attention. This is something that the larger houses are unable to give. But what they lose in quality, they make up in scale and distribution. There is, currently, in the Indian market considerable concern not only because of the entry of foreign publishing imprints, but also because of planned and fairly major changes in the Indian publishing industry. A large industrial house plans to set up hundreds of retail outlets all over the country, with an initial outlay of 150 bookshops. Smaller publishers are ambivalent about this plan: while they are hopeful that this may mean that their books will now have better distribution, they are also concerned about whether their books will get marginalized in this setup.

In the last few years, the pace of change in Indian publishing has accelerated. Not only have the numbers of publishing houses grown but, with liberalization and the opening up of markets, a number of big international players have entered the market. Recent entrants include Paragon, Random House, HarperCollins, and Cambridge University Press, and the immediate future will being Scribner, Hachette, and a number of others. Not to be outdone, large Indian companies have set up their own imprints: these include one of India's major distributors, IBD, and a bookshop chain until recently only in South India, but now planning to expand: Landmark. The entry of these large corporates has upped the stakes in every respect: the number of books being published has increased and is set to go higher, author advances are no longer a thing of the past, book launches take place at least in the main cities with alarming frequency, and many even make it to the Lifestyle and glamor pages of newspapers and magazines. In addition, publishing salaries, until recently very modest, are now beginning to compete with other, more lucrative professional remunerations. As well, the number of bookshops has increased sharply, and although there are still not enough bookshops in India to meet even the needs of its very small reading population, there is no denying the fact that, in actual numbers, we now have many more bookshops than, say, ten years ago.

What does all this mean for the small publisher, or indeed for those actors in publishing that have hitherto been somewhat marginalized, such as Indian-language publishers? What, further, does this mean not only for the small publisher but also for the politically committed publisher, for whom the market is not the key driving force? Will Indian-language writers continue to be further marginalized or will this opening-up bring opportunities for them as well? Is what we are seeing a new form of imperialism, with the foreign, multinational publishing house bringing its weight and its money to a less developed country where the capacity for 'fight back' is severely restricted because power is so unequally distributed? Another change that is envisaged on the Indian publishing scene is the expansion of the retail sector, with an Indian industrial house Reliance planning to open, in the not too distant future, as many as 150 retail outlets where books will be sold. Is this a good thing or not – or, put another way, is it better to have an Indian corporate in the market than a foreign one? None of these questions is easy to answer.

Let me attempt to explain this by using the example of the publishing house I work in, Zubaan. Zubaan, which means 'tongue, voice, language', was set up specifically to continue the work begun by Kali for Women. It came into being nineteen years after Kali was founded, by which time the women's movement both in India and elsewhere in the world had changed considerably from what it was in the 1970s and 1980s. In terms of publishing, books by and on women, for many years a rarity, have now become common and women writers often make up the most successful parts of publishers' lists. A subject that was earlier located in what was defined as a niche has rapidly moved into the mainstream. Is there, then, still room for the specialist publisher? If women's issues have become mainstream, does the feminist publisher still need to exist? This, in many ways, is a mirror-image of the question preoccupying other small presses.

At Zubaan, our belief is that while it is true to say that the women's movement has changed and developed and women's publishing has also changed, that does not necessarily mean that women-specific publishers have become defunct. There are many other areas into which such publishing can move which can help to sustain it, and for it to meet its objectives, for many years to come. However, there is no escaping the reality that competition from large publishing houses will basically mean that the smaller ones have little or no chance of success. It was with this in mind that Zubaan attempted something that was hitherto unheard of: we entered

into collaboration with Penguin India, to produce a joint list of books on and by women. Originated by Zubaan, these books are then published with a joint imprint of both houses, with expenses and profits being shared. Zubaan's proposal was to do four titles a year on this joint list – in this way, we could ensure that we did not get swamped or rendered further invisible under Penguin's shadow. A little over a year into its life, the arrangement seems to have worked well, with the joint Zubaan–Penguin list becoming seen as a desirable place to be. And it has not remained limited to English alone but has also taken in translated books.

But, interesting though this is, it is only one small initiative. Another somewhat different initiative has come from a sort of federation formed by a group of independent publishing houses. The Independent Publishers Group came together to work for the interests of independent publishing, and one of its initiatives has been to set up an alternative bookshop at the University of Delhi. As well as this, the group is looking at setting up distribution systems for independent publishers.

But the real question is whether these and other such initiatives can be adequate to face the marketization of publishing that is bound to happen with the entry of large foreign and Indian publishing houses in India. Fiercely independent and proud of their turf, smaller houses are wary of being taken over by larger ones, or of losing the advantage that they do have. But in recent months, Indian industrialists have begun to express an interest in financing the efforts of smaller publishers, offering much-needed funds in return for a share of the profits. In particular, one proposal envisages setting up a group of small publishers as a set of independent imprints under one large holding company, thereby providing enough scale to confront the larger publishers, while at the same time retaining independence and identity. Whether this will prove to be the way to go remains to be seen. What is certain is that there are plenty of challenges ahead for Indian publishers.

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Reaching New Audiences

A Conversation with Katha Press

GEETA DHARMARAJAN, RIZIO YOHANNAN RAJ AND K. DHARMARAJAN SPEAKING WITH BONNIE ZARE

FOUNDED IN 1988 by Geeta Dharmarajan, Katha Press is a leading non-profit publisher which has become synonymous with high-quality English translations: their list includes 300 of India's best-known authors, who publish in twenty-one languages. They also present the annual Katha Award for distinguished translations of Indian literature. Their mission, as their website states, is to "work with and through story to foster a culture-rich, more caring, sharing world." The organization began by publishing a magazine, *Tamasha!*, for non-literate children, to entice them into the world of print and give lessons. The organization has training programs for a number of economically deprived communities to ameliorate poverty. Katha's website can be accessed at *http://www.katha.org*.

This interview was conducted in several stages, first with Geeta Dharmarajan, the founder and team leader of Katha, and then with managing editor Rizio Yohannan Raj and team mentor K. Dharmarajan. Their comments, which were woven together and approved by all three, describe the ways that access to *bhasha* stories can be increased.

BONNIE ZARE: Katha is particularly known for the success and vision of the Katha Prize volumes – yearly collections of regional-language short stories that are carefully selected, main-

ly from regional magazines, for quality and made available in English for the first time. Please tell us more about how Katha has played a vital role in increasing both the number and the quality of translations.

KATHA PRESS: Yes, the *Economic Times* called the Katha Prize stories “a defining moment in the publishing history of India.” It is the only platform in the country that reflects contemporary translation in an immediate way. They have sold well: for instance, Volume One sold 3,000 copies in three months, and every volume has gone for multiple reprints. In fact, over the past fifteen years of volumes, not one has been pulped. There are very few books of which you can say that. Volume One (1990) is still being reprinted.

By studying the range [of the Katha Prize story volumes], you see changes in style and content. At first, the topic of poverty and misery dominated the pages, but gradually urban alienation, the breakdown of nuclear families, and cyberspace are all being explored. Our nominators, who are writers, critics, and connoisseurs are very credentialed, and we offer contests to attract the attention of new writers, rather than being content to stay with the tried and true.

The basic process is that our nominators in all parts of the country look for material, mainly sifting through a year’s issues of regional magazines. Then rough translations are done of three high-quality stories. The main editors are faced with the difficult choice of looking at 40 stories and choosing the 12 stories to print, with the goal being to have one story from each language.

Tell me more about Katha’s inception.

When I [Geeta Dharmarajan] returned from the University of Pennsylvania in the middle of the 1980s I had a major problem finding English stories by Indian writers – they were in such poor translations. I was especially inspired by the thought of translating Tamil stories into Bengali so that readers could enjoy them. At the same time, I was making a proposal to UNICEF about preparing materials that would specifically reach out to young people and develop their imagination. *Tamasha!* (the informative picture- and story-filled children’s magazine) was the eventual result of that exchange in 1989. UNICEF bought 5,000 copies and part of the money was then available to form Katha and aid the cause of translation and an adult readership. There was more waiting than doing at first, but

with the help of many Delhi luminaries and friends such as Meenakshi Mukherjee, we got the project going.

So this led to Katha having succeeded in creating a new market for Indian translation?

Yes, we started in 1988, and there was no other publisher besides the Sahitya Akademi doing translations. Think of the vital Katha India library series – these are seminal works done in each language that are now available in English translation for the first time. Now, slowly, other publishers have taken this on. While, for instance, Harper was once doing a lot of translations, it now has been bought out by a conglomerate (Random House). If a translation sold 500 copies it was still not deemed worthy. Equally importantly, the quality of our translations is regarded as of reliably high quality. We should add that this [commitment to quality] functions as a tipping point also. In other situations an author can receive a translation within two weeks, whereas we spend three to six months on every translation. Yet we cannot pass on those editorial costs in the price of the book – because it makes the book unaffordable! But we do it this way because it is the only way to project Indian literature in its variety – whether to Indians or to non-Indians. While others may look at the economic bottom line, we try to focus on quality and on the whole age of humans. We have demonstrated, and will continue to show the public and the government, the importance of the work that is being done.

How would you respond to the criticism that I have heard from some that Katha is unnecessarily repeating the work of the Akademi?

That is strange criticism, because there is plenty of work to be done! We are trying to correct a huge gap. For example, many people living in the South do not know what's happening in the literary world of the Northeast because of a shortage of materials and resources.

The Sahitya Akademi has done yeoman service in the field of translation. The awards they give are very important. But as a government organization they are sometimes constrained by necessity. Politics can enter in; they have to give an award in every year for every language, whether that has been a good year or not. Our selection of stories for the Katha Prize volumes is made by an independent panel of nominating editors. Some years, certain languages have not been represented at all; some

years, two stories from the same language appear because our panelists think that they are deserving. They [the Sahitya Akademi] have to produce x number of books per year, so the time they can spend on editing the translation becomes limited. The time and effort they are permitted to put in makes a difference in the perception of the result.

In contrast, we are able to represent a more eclectic mix of writers. Unlike the Academy, increasing access is our organization's primary goal. Our mission is to further popularize Indian fiction and translation, and we specifically have been getting the younger generation involved by hosting workshops and engaging with college students. Katha markets its own books with the goal of making them available not just in large cities but in small town bookshops, which we are slowly becoming successful at.

What is another strength of the press?

Our attempts to bring reading to children are very important. You know, age 13 to 18 is when you really start your reading habits. Katha's young adult series, which markets classic Indian texts to teenagers by holding school workshops and in the teen section of bookstores, is not being done by anyone else. Kids especially need to be sensitized to a reading culture versus the urban, fast-paced, instant-solution kind of lifestyle. Right now we see too much of the market being dominated by surface work. For instance, thrillers, which allow you to read without having to think, are bought up by urban dwellers who don't feel they have the space and time to reflect.

Whom does Katha consider to be the primary audience for its non-juvenile works?

We publish our works above all to promote the joy of reading. We want to enhance the world of books, and think of our public as all potential appreciators of good literature in India. We translate from twenty-one recognized languages (though there are many more out there) because these authors don't get read beyond their own linguistic boundaries. We have focussed mostly on contemporary fiction, though we have done a few historical works that had no previous translation and that we felt were neglected. We initially concentrated on short stories and then went on to novels and have recently done a screenplay. We have also started on poetry – no plays as of yet, but perhaps soon.

From your perspective, what is the state of the book industry in India today? How are marketplace economics helping or hurting the industry?

Today's market forces operate in a dialectical way. On the positive side, globalization enables enhanced communication systems and thereby a larger scope for reaching out to diverse audiences. This will lead to more expansion of the book trade and more bricks and mortar or internet bookshops. On the other hand, economic power gets concentrated in different areas, so it reflects what the increasingly large market players want to promote. It is frustrating to watch books get hyped that do not deserve this kind of recognition and popularity.

Consider how winning the Booker Prize gives an author the value of a brand name. We talk about it as a writer versus an author-celebrity. There's lots of media coverage about the advance, and the amount of prize money rather than the actual style and content of work. Or sometimes one aspect of the work is blown up to create controversy, which many suspect may even form part of the publisher's marketing strategy. To understand how a typical case works, let me tell you about a recent conversation with a UK distributor of Indian books. He sells remarkable copies of anything formulaic – "10 steps to Nirvana," "How to simplify your marriage," etc.; self-help and yoga and holistic healing work. But in fiction, he would name a bestseller as a work that can sell 25 to 30 copies in a year! Readers are busy people, and they buy books that appear to ease their lives – cookbooks sell like mad. Here, with Delhi's Punjabi base, the way to get status is to focus on enterprise and greater business opportunities. By contrast, reading has much greater status in the South. Particularly in Kerala, which did not experience the extremes of Partition and was more secluded and protected, there has been more leisure to read.

Could you comment on the distribution/circulation of Katha Press books and the Katha Prize books. Has it been a struggle to get these books to appear in the UK and America, for instance?

Our goal is to expand the Indian audience. The cost of entering foreign markets is high, so organizations like ours need to have our own internal finances in a certain place before we can receive a grant. Proper selling overseas is expensive: it means visiting these places, making several visits, talking up these writers. We need a guarantee that we will sell 1,000 copies minimum before people are interested. Plus these systems

operate through very large wholesalers and margins; 60 percent goes to middleman, so at the end of the day it is often not financially worthwhile.

Down the line, along with improving international internet sites to make it easier to buy our books, we might choose twenty authors to push. After that the market may be created – there's no point in spending a lot of energy making the books available if no one knows about them.

Given your extensive work with translators, you are in a unique position to comment on their work. What, for instance, are the hindrances to developing more translators/translations?

Translation is not paid well, and it's hard to lure people to it as a profession. Not only is the IT industry walling off people from pursuing other opportunities (because it is so well-paid), translation is seen as more of an individual pet project, based on passion. Translators should be seen as professionals; yet the specialty of this skill is not recognized, and the pay scale shows this as well.

Basically, India has almost no state systems of support for writers and translators, no equivalent to the UK's National Arts Council or Guggenheim in the USA. In the regional languages there are very few full-time writers – they can't afford to be. There are only a few government grants for writers, and you must apply constantly, so you need an income from another source. Translation money is more available if there is a guarantee of sales. If you are translating a book by Gabriel García Márquez it is more of a known quantity than if translating from a regional-language author. We need to respect the fact that writing and translating are as good as doing any other occupation.

I notice that, especially in the first Katha Prize volumes of the early 1990s, most of the writers are male and the translators are female.

It is hard to find male translators. From the beginning I consciously looked for women writers, but they were difficult to find. At times I loved a story – and learned that the author's female name was actually the penname of a man. They were so invisible even when we chose female editors. Plus they had to be of high quality – we were unwilling to make special concessions simply to have them. In any case, I am happy to say that has really changed now. More exposure to the wider world through television and other means has meant more women able to adopt an

outsider perspective, a space to question, which is what you need to create text. I think it's a very happy situation that we have in India today. Many of the women writers today are coming from non-literate families and some from Dalit families. Every time a woman writes she is stepping out of traditional boundaries. They are now thinking: 'I can write, I can use my dialect'.

*As you know well, English language writing has been defining the cultural parameters of Indian literature in a global context, given the attention paid to anglophone writing in international and metropolitan newspapers and literary reviews, in college classrooms, in multinational public companies, and in international prizes. It is alleged that such an emphasis ignores the innovations, the creative energies, and the excellence of vernacular/regional/*bhasha *language writing in India. Your thoughts?*

Well, more and more people are getting into writing English because people understand the exposure you may get by writing in English. People are encouraged to write in their original languages, though, by our providing translators, so that people are assured that they may have eventual translations available to a wider audience. After all, it is forced to remain local if there is no translation into English. We are interested in language-to-language translation, and we have done some projects. But we've had problems getting direct translations; we have fewer skilled people available for language-to-language translation without an intermediate step in another language. But, once in English, a Malayalam novel can now more likely get a Bangla (or also a German) translation, you see. As a second step we would like to see great works translated into at least five to ten Indian languages; but that is further down the line.

So… exactly what is your position on the global reach of anglophone dominance, then?

[*laughter*] Yes, we don't mean to avoid that question! We agree that it was an historic, important moment when Krishna Sobti, one of the finest authors we've translated, won the 2005 Hutch Crossword award: she pointed out that it was probably the first time a *bhasha* writer was sharing an award stage with English-language writers.[1] Overall, though, we think

[1] The other two winners were Salman Rushdie and Suketu Mehta.

that dwelling on so-called anglophone dominance is an unnecessary distraction from more important issues. Our position on English is that it is as much an Indian language as any other. That's an on-the-ground reality, especially in the South. (We dislike the term 'anglophone', as it is a word associated with the colonial legacy.) English initiates a dialogue; there is no denying that English is the link language between India's multilingual and multicultural people. We see no point in pitting languages against one another when the educated public is fairly trilingual or at the very least bilingual.

Publishing Translations

An Interview with MINI KRISHNAN, Oxford University Press

NALINI IYER: I would like to begin by asking you to briefly describe how you entered the world of editing, especially editing translations, with Macmillan and Oxford University Press (OUP). The list of works you have edited for Macmillan and OUP is very impressive and includes works in Tamil, Bengali, Hindi, Oriya, Kannada, and so on. How many languages are you fluent in? Many of us who grow up in India have multilingual fluency and know/speak many languages to various degrees. Yet the work you do must require understanding of conversational and literary registers of these languages. Could you comment on your intellectual history?

MINI KRISHNAN: I was a good student of English Literature right through and always wanted to be a teacher of literature. BA Honours first class first in Bangalore University, first class in MA English Literature, Delhi University, 1973. When I settled in Madras after marriage, I couldn't get a job in a college, as there were laws that obliged you to pass an exam in Tamil. As the daughter of a journalist (Father was editor of the *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore), I got to read a number of newspapers and books that he received for review. I loved to read English translations of our literature even as a teenager. I didn't mind even the bad translations. It seemed to me that it was a world that simply wasn't available in books written originally in English. In BA Honours I was one of the few students – the only South Indian – who took Hindi Literature as the second optional (subsidiary) when we were offered History, Political Science, Economics as subsidiary to a major in English Lit. I had earlier done the

Madhyama and Rashtrabhasha[1]… my own language Malayalam I could read haltingly, having picked it up from reading headlines and film-posters. Do I know any other language well? No. Enough to manage … yes, Kannada. Sanskrit I picked up much later as part of my Vedanta studies, in my forties. I did some free-lance editing for Orient Longman and Macmillan from 1978 to 1980. In late 1980 I got a half-time job as Branch Editor of Macmillan, Madras…. Most of the editorial work was done in Delhi and the Madras program was a small one, Annotated Classics, a few anthologies for the lucrative general English studies market in Kerala and Tamil Nadu universities. At least, that is what I thought when I entered the company. Within ten days of work, the Kerala Sahitya Akademi came to us with a mammoth project – *Comparative Indian Literature*.[2] A 4,000-page script edited by K.M. George, with 200 contributors and fifteen language editors. That was a revelation. For five years I edited nothing else! It was a grand survey of our literature – sixteen languages and all genres. It appeared in two volumes in 1985–87. To this day there is nothing like it. Anyway, working on it made me realize –- as I wrote up the synopsis of classic after classic, modern and ancient – that the primary texts couldn't be read by anyone who didn't know the original languages. So …. I thought… 'Hmm… why not begin a small project of translations?' Only the Sahitya Akademi had a program of translations, and Orient Longman had a small list called the Sangam Books. Everybody laughed at the very idea. "Not with my money you don't," said the Managing Director of Macmillan. So I went to the UGC [University Grants Commission] with a plan. Madhuri Ben Shah said, "Yes – I will give you the twenty lakhs you need but you must route the money *only* through people working in universities." Since most of the talented people I spoke with for translating texts were outside universities, I declined the offer.

Life went on; I was into full-time editing of textbooks and science journals; I was M.S. Swaminathan's publisher, I did any number of reference books, but I kept looking for the money for translation. I kept collecting synopses and ideas for what books I could eventually bring out. If anyone ever imagined their dream and made it happen it was me! I don't think

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[1] Madhyama and Rashtrabhasha are courses offered by the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, which facilitates the learning of Hindi in Southern India.

[2] *Comparative Indian Literature*, ed. K.M. George (Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi; Madras: Macmillan India, 1984–85).

there is a single corporate house I didn't go to, hat in hand. Finally, I got the money I needed through my friend Mrs Valli Alagappan, the daughter of A.M.M Arunachalam, the President of the M.R.A.R Educational Society. It was like finding a cache of gold in my backyard. They said they would set aside fifty lakhs for fifty-five translations, and I designed a project of five novels each from eleven different languages.

Macmillan were unmoved. "As long as you do not slow down on our textbook program you may do this project" was their attitude. The books were fully funded. For giving the books their imprint and distributing them, Macmillan received money. Fifty-five percent of the net sales went to Macmillan, forty-five percent of net sales back to M.R.A.R., who were happy to fund further plans. I was the first to insist that the royalty of ten percent be equally divided between author and translator. I was the first to place the translator's name on the cover page. I released eleven books in 1996, seven books in 1997, six books in 1998, five in 1999, the five-volume *Ponniyin Selvan*[3] in 2000 and beyond, even after I left Macmillan for OUP. One of my conditions for joining OUP was that I should be allowed to complete projects I would otherwise have left undone at Macmillan. For the Macmillan project, because my name meant nothing to the literary landscape I worked with resource persons, but my chief editors, with the exception of Ranga Rao for Telugu, were largely decorative.

When I found that Macmillan were not interested in even seeing the potential of the project, I decided to shift to OUP, who had a strong Indology list and a history of translations, though not anything undertaken systematically.

Could you explain the relationship between author, translator, and editor of a text? How do you interface with author and translator?

Both become very close friends. One has to win their confidence, and as I draft revisions of the translated text, I work very, very closely with the translator, and if the author knows even a bit of English, I keep checking with him/her. I rely on them to show the edited drafts to friends who know enough of both English and the source-language texts. I make both author and translator initial every page of the final proof so that no one can say "Oh, did I see this?"

[3] R. Kalki Krishnamurthy, *Ponniyin Selvan*, tr. C.V. Karthik Naryanan, 5 vols. (Chennai: Macmillan, 2000).

What do large, multinational presses anticipate as challenges to bringing out translations of writers that are well-received in their original language? What factors help them determine what authors to support? I wonder if you could reflect on what kinds of interventions must be made to expand the vision of the typical publishing committee.

I don't think it is difficult now to persuade a group to invest in translation because sales of a translation is the chief worry. No one can afford to do a list just for prestige. But today UGC is supporting translation studies in colleges and universities. It isn't difficult to get some interest, and one should slowly build a list that might become recommended study or compulsory study in the very near future. Also, the numbers of what I call 'language orphans' is increasing – that is, Indians who speak a language well but cannot read it. What is difficult is to get really powerful talent past advisors' publishing committees who don't know enough about what is happening in this or that language. Particularly in a country like India, it isn't likely that someone who knows the Southern scene well will also know what is happening in Assamiya, in Urdu, in Gujarati. That is the problem. And people are so unwilling to admit that they don't know enough.

You have worked on some very important contemporary Tamil writers. You discovered Bama, and her book Karukku *(2001) won the Hutch Crossword award, as did Chandra Sekhar Rath's* Astride the Wheel *(Oriya, 2005). Your recent work with Ambai (C.S. Lakshmi) for* In a Forest, a Deer *also won the 2006 Hutch Crossword award. How do you negotiate the differences in linguistic registers when you translate into English? In other words, what are the challenges of representing cultural differences within a language for those who read these works in English?*

In attempting to translocate India's tremendous linguistic complexities, every text is a challenge, and I don't think there are norms. I've done far more work on some of the other award winners like *Bharathipura*[4] (U.R. Ananthamurthy) from Kannada and the 2005 Hutch Crossword award winner, *Astride the Wheel*[5] (Oriya) than on the Dalit texts. The challenge

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[4] U.R. Ananthamurthy, *Bharatipura*, tr. P. Sreenivasa Rao (Chennai: Macmillan, 1996).

[5] Chandra Sekhar Rath, *Astride the Wheel*, tr. Jatindra Kumar Nayak (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2003).

is to make the text beautiful, clear, without embellishments, over-writing or losses. You're translating not just words but a whole culture. English is from a land where there is no such thing as a *yagna* or caste system or rambling, complicated kinship terms. We have to find a third language – it isn't Kannada/Hindi/Oriya, it isn't wholly English. You have to 'throw' voices … you know… it's literary ventriloquism.

Your work with Bama, Joseph Macwan, and Sharankumar Limbale[6] *is especially important in terms of bringing marginalized Dalit voices to both Indian and non-Indian audiences. Did you face any particular challenges in convincing the press (Macmillan/OUP) to invest in Dalit writing? What about the author, editor, translator relationship in the case of Dalit writing compared to your other projects? How do you ensure that the process of translation and publication does not result in appropriation of the Dalit writer's work?*

There is more than one question here…. Funding was never a problem for me… I have always had my sponsors to back me. In fact when the history of translation of Indian literature into English is written it will have to recognize the contribution of the M.R.A.R. Educational Society. Macmillan wasn't interested enough to know what I was planning. The Managing Director was sympathetic and did okay a sister list to the main translation program when I wrote saying that Dalit literature was going to be very important in a few years' time. Nobody else really noticed, but when the reviews appeared the upper-caste management told me not to send out further letters inviting Dalit writers to send in news about their work. OUP has a great system of reviewing and assessing every single book. Nothing gets done by default or accident. They had already done academic books on caste and its problems, and hesitated a bit. They were unused to doing very new, very contemporary creative writing and are a much more traditional house, after all, and a university press. So I really admire the way my Publishing Director backed me and said "Yes, we'll go ahead with this." Your other question… I don't know what you mean by 'appropriation'! It is either be 'appropriated' by a publishing colossus

[6] Bama, *Karukku*, tr. Lakshmi Holmström (Chennai: Macmillan, 2000); Bama Faustina, *Sangati*, tr. Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2004); Sharankumar Limbale, *The Outcaste*, tr. Santosh Bhoomkar (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2003); Joseph Macwan, *The Stepchild*, tr. Rita Kothari (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2003).

and become famous or remain in obscurity. My role is to see that the author is satisfied with the final product. It wasn't easy at all to find a new third language that was neither mainstream Indian language in English nor the unusual 'dialect' of Dalit writing. For instance, Lakshmi Holmström used phrases like "He ran hell for leather" in the first draft of *Karukku*, and I had to gently suggest that it was too Western, as in the case of the word 'briars' for thorny… etc.

What I would call 'appropriation' is the straying in, into this territory, of people who have no business to place themselves as victims of the same kind of despair – such as Uttara Natarajan's biography of her grandfather with the provocative title *A Sudra's Story*.[7] That's appropriation! That is distracting from the much greater pain Dalits have endured and are continuing to endure. Sattanathan waits bare-bodied in the sun to see a Brahmin patron because he hadn't enough money to study. As if all Brahmins are well-heeled! What about the thousands of impoverished Brahmins? How is their plight any different? But a cloud of impressions is created, Karunanidhi releases the book, jokes are made about *poonool* [sacred thread worn by Brahmin men] and so on. That's what I call appropriation. Ghettoization is the more serious thing. I have heard that there are any number of women students who are doing their M.Phil on Bama but will not talk to fellow students who are Dalits.

U.R. Ananthamurthy has said that even when a book such as his is well translated, translation from an Indian language to English or any other European language is not a very happy affair. For him "The cultural aspect does not get fully translated […]. When there is cultural exchange, that flavour is lost."[8] *What do you think? When we read translations, are we frequently reading a lesser text?*

Well… yes, flavour is lost… but … do readers of the Bible in Marathi or the *Gita* in English feel any the less comforted or thrilled, I wonder. "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God….*" – Christ said that in Aramaic. I bet it sounded better, but "*Seek ye first …*" is good enough for me. And "*Jahi shatrum mahabaho..*" " *Rise up O glorious one and destroy the enemy....*"

[7] A.N. Sattanathan, *Plain Speaking: A Sudra's Story*, ed. Uttara Natarajan (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006).

[8] *At Home in the World*, ed. K. Satchidanandan et al. (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2005): 285.

Both religious texts I've mentioned are also literary texts. So… my answer is: translation is for those who do not know the original.

Could you compare the translation projects undertaken by companies like Macmillan and OUP to that of work by non-profits like Katha or that of organizations like Sahitya Akademi? What kind of resources and market reach do you have at OUP in relation to these entities? How might your target audiences differ?

First, resources…. I don't know what you mean by 'non-profit'. Of course Katha makes profits. It is when you register as non-profit that you can get a certain sort of funding. (In fact, Katha's paperbacks are more expensive than the hardbacks I bring out through OUP with the funding of the M.R.A.R Educational Society.) Sahitya Akademi will go on whether or not they sell their stocks, and they have no editorial policies at all; most of their books are unreadable. No editor painstakingly develops a translated text they way Geetha and I do our books. Second, target audiences are one and the same, but Sahitya Akademi books are not available in bookshops – only in their offices. And OUP has a natural network in colleges and universities that Katha as yet does not have. I should say that Katha and Macmillan and OUP, in the main, are working the same terrain, though Katha began as short-story prize collections that did not look further back than the year in which the stories were published. I suspect that it was on seeing what I did through Macmillan that Geetha decided to branch out into other projects, and she did splendidly. To this day, there is nothing to touch the Katha Classics except the OUP Tagore volumes.

Indian literature written originally in English to some degree dominates the global marketplace in comparison to bhasha *or vernacular Indian literature. Do you think that OUP and Macmillan, with their global reach, have been successful in promoting Indian-language literatures to begin to counter this hegemony?*

Macmillan, shamefully for them, let go a great opportunity. The reason I left was that they simply refused to move their BMW built singlehandedly by me and not even with their own money (!). This is recorded history, and at least sixty writers and translators are my witnesses. If they had taken a stronger initiative, things would have moved faster and further. But the entry into translation of a big traditional textbook publisher like them encouraged many other publishers to move into it. What they all

thought was, "If Macmillan are in it then there must be money in it." Mind you, David Davidar of Penguin was the really courageous publisher who commissioned and published a number of translations in the late 1980s, early 1990s, but he was badly served by indifferent editors; and, of course, Penguin is known for their assembly-line production. No attention to detail at all. "He was not wearing a cap on his head…" appears on the first page of *The House of Kanooru*.[9] Tell me, where else would a man wear a cap?

You were among the first to recognize the demand for translations that were appropriate for classroom use. Please describe the educational settings that some of your projects are most likely to be used in, and also what kind of apparatus (glossary, etc.) is needed for this context and why. For instance, some authors and presses may see putting in footnotes or glossaries as unnecessarily interrupting the flow of the work or as unnecessarily implying that readers must be spoon-fed instead of doing the work on their own. I wondered if there was merit to these claims or whether they mask a desire to save resources (effort, page space, printing costs) for other projects.

Such criticisms come from people who do not really wish to read a text to understand it fully. A dilettante reading satisfies them. As long ago as 1996, two of the Tamil novels I published through Macmillan (*Lamps in the Whirlpool* by Rajam Krishnan and *Yamini* by Chudamani Raghavan)[10] became set texts in many autonomous colleges in Tamil Nadu and at Bharathiyar University. The critical and editorial supports must include a good introduction contextualizing the work and writer, and notes and glossaries to explain untranslatable words and customs – *madi*, *shaligramam*, *sambandham*, etc. – all the material and complex aspects of our culture.

Some publishers and writers have commented on the difficulty of finding good translators. Has that been your experience, too? What is the future of translation as a profession in India? What are the best ways forward

[9] Kuvempu, *House of Kanooru*, tr. B.C. Ramachandra Sharma & Padma Ramachandra Sharma (New Delhi: Penguin, 1999).

[10] Rajam Krishnan, *Lamps in the Whirlpool*, tr. Uma Narayanan & Prema Seetharam (Madras: Macmillan, 1996); Chudamani Raghavan *Yamini*, tr. Vasantha Surya (Madras: Macmillan, 1996).

for encouraging more people to undertake translation as a profession and encouraging translators to produce high-quality translations?

Yes, it is true that really first-rate translators are difficult to come by. But herein comes the role of the editor. Translation really is a collaborative effort. The thing is, one needs to be bi-cultural and extremely creative. It isn't enough to know two languages well. One must be able to make a creative transfer. I think the future of translation as a profession in India is immense. The National Translation Mission has been set up under the National Knowledge Commission, and though it is meant for all kinds of knowledge transfer it will give a huge boost to literary translation. The more the industry and market expect from translations, the greater the professionalism we will see, as also its due rewards and prestige.

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III

Translation and Transcreation

Translation and Globalization

Tamil Dalit Literature and Bama's *Karukku*

ANUSHIYA SIVANARAYANAN

THE 1992 NOVEL *KARUKKU* by the Tamil writer Bama is written in autobiographical style and describes how the female narrator comes to understand the various dimensions of her Dalit identity.[1] By not naming the narrator and never disclosing the given authorial name except as the author persona Bama, the 'I' of the narrative presents itself as a collective voice; it aligns itself with the 'grand narrative' (a "progressive emancipation of reason and freedom"[2]) of the Dalit emancipatory project. As the editor's note to the English translation makes clear, "Bama's *Karukku*, a text though structured like a novel, is not fiction."[3] At the same time, *Karukku* as a narrative, with its own trajectories of place and history and a first-person narrator with her particularized stories, destabilizes the modes of universalization and determinacy of the larger Dalit liberatory project.[4] The very form of language that

[1] Bama, *Karukku*, tr. Lakshmi Holmström (Chennai: Macmillan, 2000).

[2] Jean–François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993): 17.

[3] Bama, *Karukku*, v.

[4] The word 'Dalit' does not function on its own in the novel. The word encodes within itself its etymological history (of the 'untouchable' becoming Gandhi's 'Harijan' who then refuses both terms and becomes 'Dalit'); it is a history that is barely hinted in *Karukku* in the shape of Bama's brother, who clearly functions as a politicized Dalit activist. The newness of the word, its semantic possibilities are explored in *Karukku*; but by referring back to its "broken people" meaning only, Bama refuses to explore other ways of interrogating caste formulations even though her own narrative

Bama chooses to use – the colloquial, non-literary Tamil of the working classes – adds to its individuality. To read *Karukku* only as a Dalit novel for caste liberation becomes impossible once we recognize certain tropes in the text that resist such a univocal reading. What is most significant about these rhetorical devices is the way they reappear in the translation, too, as unstable moments, beyond the control of the author/ translator, opening the text to other readings and interpretations.

Karukku was translated into English by Lakshmi Holmström in 2000 and won the prestigious national Crossword Award for translation in 2002. It is a novel that has found itself firmly lodged in the classrooms of Tamil as well as world literatures, where it is read as a novel that represents a whole class of people who have been kept out of mainstream literary and social venues for many centuries. It is important to note that Bama's novel, for the first time, extends and reconstructs the question of Dalit identity in Tamil literature.[5] The novel moves from the village to the convent, traverses the marginal communities of the urban poor, and constantly repeats certain childhood memories of caste formation to provide ways of understanding Dalit identity formations within South Indian cultures.

The 1990s saw a resurgence of Dalit literature in Tamil, and *Karukku* has won critical acclaim as a novel that places Dalit subjectivity at the center of its narrative.[6] Its translation and acclaimed reception takes place

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provides places for such questionings to take place. See Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), Partha Chatterjee, "The Nation and its Outcastes," in his *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1993): 173–99; Hugo Gorringe, *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratization in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005).

[5] Bama's *Karukku* is by no means the first Tamil Dalit autobiography (though it is the first female Tamil Dalit autobiography). Ravikumar in his preface to *Vadu*, the autobiography of the Tamil Dalit artist, K.A. Gunasekaran, notes that Irattaimalai Seenivasan's *Jeeviya Sarithra Surukkam* (New Delhi: Sahithya Akademi, 1999), which was written in the early years of the twentieth century, could be regarded as the first Tamil Dalit autobiography. See K.A. Gunesekaran, *Vadu* ["Scar"] (Nagerkoil: Kalachuvadu, 2004). Like Bama's *Karukku*, Irattaimalai Seenivasan proposes a Dalit liberatory motivation to his autobiography.

[6] *Karukku* allowed a critical re-evaluation of other canonical Tamil novels (from the 1927 novel *Murugan the Farmer* by K.C. Vengadaramani to the modern novels of Jayakanthan) that portrayed Dalits in key narrative positions. Historically, men belong-

in a time period that also witnessed the rapid dissemination of goods and labor in an international arena that has now come to be called 'globalization'. The rise of Dalit liberatory politics in the same decade has allowed *Karukku* to be read primarily as a Dalit novel that explains the Dalit condition to the world at large.[7]

The translation of the novel and its easy adoption into the literary canon has meant that Bama is increasingly read only as a spokesperson for Dalit liberation. Pramod K. Nayar's argument that *Karukku* needs to be "read less as an individual's 'life-writing' than as a *testimonio*" in which Bama's narrative becomes a collective testimony to caste-based violence rather than an individual woman's struggle against caste, class, and gender prescriptions, bases itself upon the translated version of the text to make

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ing to upper-caste groups wrote Tamil novels in the late Nineteenth century. Writers like P.R. Rajamaiyar (1896), A. Madhavaiya (1898), and Vedhanayagam Pillai (1879) – who indicated their upper caste status, with the suffix to their names – wrote about contemporary issues affecting their own caste and class communities. The Tamil novels that came out in the period between the 1930s and the 1960s – rather like Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* – deal with Gandhi's social reform movements and the effect they had on Indian villages and the 'untouchable' castes. But all these novels, even when they dealt sympathetically with characters of Dalit origin – unlike the two English novels, the early Tamil novels portrayed Dalits as wastrels – represented the Dalit characters from the point of view of educated, upper-class, caste Hindus. Even when the novels claimed to deal with the oppressions suffered by Dalits, as in the case of Kalki's *Thyaga Bhoomi* (1962) – which was about a Brahmin protagonist who suffers from social ostracism for allowing a Dalit to live in his house – the novels were more about nationalist middle-class consciousness speaking on behalf of the Dalit than any kind of genuine analysis or presentation of Dalit experiences. Bama's *Karukku*, when it came out on 1992, was hailed as the first of its kind in explaining what it was like to slowly realize that one was born a Dalit. Like Beauvoir's assertion, Bama's novel is a description of the nuts and bolts of caste construction.

[7] Translations of Dalit writings have increasingly come under attack in this age of globalization. Critics point to the easy ways Dalit texts have been absorbed into the West in their translated forms as simply another product. Rita Kothari, in *Translating India* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2003), points to the large translating industry that has quickly developed in India and points to the prestige of the Crossword award itself as an indication of the enormous influence wielded by the field of translation. For a representative, critical view of translations as a part of globalization, and the autobiography itself as a safe, 'touchable' form for dominant cultures to experience the Dalit, see *Touchable Tales: Publishing and Reading Dalit Literature*, ed. S. Anand (Pondicherry: Navayana, 2003).

its pronouncements.[8] By prioritizing one aspect of the novel only – namely, its testimonial role – Nayar's reading participates in the familiar ideological task of building a scaffolding of sentimentality around the text. Similar to the role played by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was read in the nineteenth century both as a novel of sentiment and as a political argument for the abolition of slavery, one that naturally led to the other, *Karukku* in its compressed English version allows for a singular reading. The emotional complexity and the linguistic dexterity that comes to a point in the lyrical, exploratory form of Bama's Tamil *Karukku* are absent from its English translation.

Let me explain. In the author's preface, the narrator explains the metaphor that functions as the title of the novel.

> There are many congruities between the saw-edged palmyra Karukku and my own life. Not only did I pick up the scattered palmyra Karukku in the days when I was sent out to gather firewood, scratching and tearing my skin as I played with them; but later they also became the embryo and symbol that grew into this book.[9]

Bama refers to the common palmyra leaf that is used as cooking fuel and roofing material among the poor in South Indian villages, but the word 'karu', which means 'embryo' in Tamil, is also brought into play. Interestingly, the above statement functions as the opening salvo to the English translation. In the Tamil version, it appears almost at the end of the author's preface, like an after-thought. The Tamil preface instead speaks poignantly about Bama's state of mind when she wrote the novel – of how lost she felt, lacking any sense of her future, and of her intention to simply write her life history without any kind of consciousness about language, genre or reception. Such a claim for rhetorical innocence is lost in the English version of the Preface, which instead presents an unequivocal

[8] Pramod K. Nayar, "Bama's *Karukku*: Dalit Autobiography as *Testimonio*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 6 (2006): 83. Nayar's essay assumes the translated version as the only text under discussion in a way that proves the misgivings of the essayists in *Touchable Tales*. A title like Ravikumar's "Achievement's Language: The Language of Achievement" describing his preface to Gunasekaran's autobiography *Vadu* (see note 4) would be impossible in Nayar's kind of reading, which never even refers to the Tamil version.

[9] Bama, *Karukku*, xiii.

motivation on the part of Bama to be the voice of “other Dalit hearts like mine, to create a new society made up of justice, equality and love.”[10] The English translation picks out what had been buried within a personal narrative of false starts, digressions, and circular arguments, and places it as a header, a bullet point of authorial intentionality. By relentlessly focussing on the caste-based motivation for writing, rather than on the claim for personal suffering that the Tamil version prioritizes, the English translation allows us to interrogate only the intersection between the text and the Dalit emancipatory politics that functions as a foundation in both the texts. The personal, the peculiar, the elements that refuse to be placed under the heading of a conscious liberatory rhetoric are left out.

I am not surprised at the conclusions Nayar draws about the role played by Dalit autobiographies as being essentially different from non-Dalit autobiographies, given the relentless focus of the English *Karukku* in presenting an indivisible Dalit liberatory politics. I can understand the well-meaning, liberal humanist impulses of Nayar, who seeks to find some way of providing the *Karukku* he has in hand with a textual edifice that will work and wear as the novel is read in English in classrooms around the world. But to deny Bama’s *Karukku* the same kind of literary respect that one might give to an autobiography by a non-Dalit writer is rather unfair. Given the initial reception the author Bama received from her own village community (which was appalled that one of their own might write about their idiosyncrasies to a larger world that already despised them as Dalit), and from a non-Dalit reading public that found everything from her language choices to her narrative subject deeply offensive, it is even more important to read *Karukku* critically.[11]

A close reading of *Karukku* reveals a complex pattern of ambivalent (sometimes contradictory) responses on the part of the narrator, a pattern that becomes indistinct in Bama’s subsequent works. What remains (especially in a novel like *Sangati*, Bama’s second novel) is a singular insistence that we read her writings as peculiarly Dalit and nothing else. This could have happened only to a Dalit, she insists, in the face of the various elements in her text – for instance, the marvelously individualized stories

[10] Bama, *Karukku*, xiii.

[11] “Educated woman are bad enough; an educated Parayar woman is the worst,” one of her detractors wrote to her after *Karukku* came out in 1992. Personal interview with author (16 July 2006).

of her Dalit community – that contradict her repeated statement. Her espousal of a political Dalit liberation agenda, on the one hand, and her recognition of the importance of the details of her own story (a recognition that grows into her second novel *Sangati* as a self-consciously resolved collection of 'we' stories), on the other, contribute to the tension and, in my view, the significance of *Karukku*.

Bama is faced with a genuine dilemma in *Karukku* – her ontological sense of being is described to her as being wholly Dalit: thus her stories are Dalit stories; no one else – no non-Dalit – could tell these particular stories. A recognition of her identity as a Dalit means that the only way she finds meaning in telling her tale is to place it within an already existing framework of Dalit identity politics. Given the determinations of the caste structure that initially place Bama as a Dalit, her act of rejecting the given is a return to a state where she reformulates her identity within a Dalit-drawn liberatory project. Her story, she argues, could only be told from within the metanarrative of the Dalit emancipatory project. To renounce this subject position, she believes, would also entail her renouncing any claim to a rhetoric that stands for justice and freedom. How does she arrive at this conclusion?

Bama's path of self-fashioning is predictable in deterministic ways. Like other women who wish to disentangle themselves from a severely patriarchal society that sees them as nothing but walking wombs, Bama's autobiography is a detailed description of how she educated herself and became a teacher/nun. She clearly believed that such a role would give her the space and freedom that a traditional marriage would deny her. Instead, she finds the institution of the Church and its schools riven by the same caste system she deplored and tried to escape in her village. This realization that the tentacles of caste reach into every level of society is a profound shock to her. The liberal humanist promise of education and a vocation had fooled her into believing in a utopian state of a casteless society.

Bama's personal narrative, as she tells it, denies the truth claims of the liberal humanist project. As her narrative begins with her childhood and she describes her memories of the ways her local Catholic church and church-run school functioned, Bama begins to problematize the institutional structures of her society that had from the beginning been predicated on asymmetrical relationships. In *Karukku*, the whole Parayar community of the narrator is Catholic and treated as a despised lower class by

the church authorities. Bama's criticism of the corruption, arrogance, and condescension of the church authorities of her time toward the Parayar community could be traced to the Church's earliest days in the Madurai region of Tamil Nadu. From the time of the first Catholic missions in South India, the European missionaries adopted the caste-based practices of the powerful Brahmin society they were attempting to convert.[12] Bama enumerates how the priests and nuns practice the exploitative exchange economy of the secular world and participate in promoting the purification rituals of the 'upper-caste' groups. Bama's *Karukku* traces her disillusionment with both the liberal promises of a humanist education and the incorrigible actions of a Church that refuses to acknowledge its own teachings of brotherly love and compassion.

In *Karukku*, the narrator's own experiences in getting an education – even though, paradoxically, it also led to her learning to critically question the situation of her people through her writing – explain the crucial role played by Catholic institutions within her community in providing opportunities for social mobility. Bama's choice to become a nun is not made out of any kind of religious transformation but out of a desire to become part of a powerful institution that was involved in minority education. Accordingly, the reasons Bama gives for taking holy orders are deeply vocational in terms of her given identity as a Dalit. In fact, it is in the sections where she describes the caste discrimination she faced in Church-run institutions that Bama is most convincing in her claim of a singular caste identity. The most moving part of her narrative comes when she finds out that the subject position she had taken on – her willing transformation into nun and teacher – in no way protects her from the slings and arrows of being identified as Dalit. And *Karukku* gets stuck at this stage, unable to seek other ways of making sense of Bama's ontological situation. Imbricated in the coils of a particular ideology, Bama chooses to stay within the representational modes offered by a univocal Dalit identity politics.

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[12] Called Malabar Rites, the Church authorities divided all church activities according to the separation of castes favored by the Brahmins of the region. The converted Brahmin was allowed to keep his caste identification markers – the *codhumbi* or tied back long hair, the cord, the sandal and the ceremonial bath. In the sixteenth century, Roberto de Nobili, began the first South Indian mission. De Nobili comported himself like a Brahmin – he became vegetarian, learnt Sanskrit and called himself a *sanyasi* (see *Catholic Encyclopedia*, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09558b.htm).

Significantly, Raj Gowthaman, in the August 1991 issue of *Melum* ('Also'), argues that Dalit literature is not the province of only those born within castes defined as Dalit but belongs to any " literature that critiques the politics of caste, religion, familial, and sexually exploitative economic formulations."[13] He goes even further to claim that "any literature that undertakes such politically motivated writing, anyone who is ideologically Dalit, can produce Dalit literature."[14] Raj Gowthaman's inclusive, wide-ranging, and politically defined identity formulation flies in the face of the abstract, narrow, and deliberately essentialist meaning of caste hitherto given to the Dalit subject by the dominant culture. By refusing to accept the socially sanctioned belief in caste as an unchangeable given in human life, Gowthaman portrays being Dalit as a subject position that is available to anyone involved in liberatory activities.[15] The practices of caste (similar to the practices of racial segregation and violence) take place primarily on the body of the Dalit. Remember the scene on the bus when a woman seated next to Bama asks her where she lived in order to find out her caste? Paradoxically, for all her railing against a society that treats Dalits in discriminatory ways, Bama finds herself occupying an essentialized position, mainly because of her refusal to critically question her caste- and gender-inscribed body in any direct fashion.

Bama complicates understandings of caste, gender, and class formations in her society only because of her personal choices (her decisions to stay single, to leave the Church, to live outside her village community), which mark out a trajectory, a counter-discourse, that refuses all easy generalizations. And yet, she presents these decisions as foregone conclusions rather than as the result of certain forms of critical thought. Foucault

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[13] Raj Gowthaman, "Ozhi vattangal Thevai illai" [There is no need for circles of light], *India Today* (December 1995): 96.

[14] Raj Gowthaman, "Ozhi vattangal Thevai illai," 96.

[15] I explain my own position of being a Sri Lankan Tamil, of having grown up in a society that treats Tamils as second class citizens, where the fear of violence against one's ethnic Tamil self was a constant companion as Tamils went about their daily activities, for my deep visceral identification with Dalit literary and political activities. Raj Gowthaman's definition makes it possible for many of us to explain our selves as occupying the ontological position of the Dalit as the despised Other. See the blog of the Sri Lankan Tamil writer Shobasakthi for his collation of "anti-establishment, class consciousness, Dalitism and postmodernism" as equally interchangeable and ideologically meaningful subject-positions (http://www.satiyakadatasi.com).

describes as “work of thought” a situation where thought becomes “something quite different from the set of representations that underlies a certain behavior”; also as “something quite different from the domain of attitudes that can determine this behavior.”[16] . In fact, thought allows one “ to step back, to present it to oneself, as an object of thought and question it as to its meaning, its conditions and goals.”[17] For only when the accepted mode – a subject position as a Dalit woman, for instance – is interrogated in terms of its singularity (i.e. when thinking denies the comfort of the familiar) can that problematization begin. *Karukku* begins such a problematization of how caste identity is practiced but stops short of carrying the analysis through.

Bama’s *Karukku* (and *Sangati*, too) reminds me of the young black men in North America who claim an urban identity for themselves by certain fashion choices. They wear their outsize pants low, almost slipping off their hips, without a belt. It is a gesture that is designed to remind one of a prison culture that disallows the wearing of belts. In a curious act of pointing back, mostly as an act of defiance of the middle-class norms of spit and polish, these loose-hipped pants represent a race and, by extension, a class that writes a destiny on the body of the black male. With the burgeoning black male population in U.S. prisons, and the endemic poverty in urban black neighborhoods, the ‘free’ black male walking down the street with his pants sans belt becomes a signifier of his brother in prison; worse, he predicts his own potential future behind bars. Bama is equally deterministic. The Enlightenment rhetoric that failed her once also means that she cannot see herself as a being-in-the-world who could either question or transcend the codes, laws, and language constructions that have defined her only as a Dalit. She refuses any such space where she could problematize her given identity, unlike, for instance, James Baldwin, the black writer who constantly interrogated the givenness of his racial self. Bama avoids such questioning, even though her narrative relies on and acknowledges explicitly the larger framework of Enlightenment-derived values. Her repeated appeals to shared standards of justice and fairness in her description of Dalit life in the village and later in the

[16] Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: Interview with Paul Rabinowitz,” tr. Lydia Davis, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinowitz (New York: Pantheon, 1984): 388.

[17] Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,” 388.

various Church-run institutions she becomes a part of depends on a consensual framework of reason. Bama believes that this framework – one that she accepts uncritically as a transparent, unchanging model of truth statements – is enough to explain the whys and wherefores of her deeply painful and personal decisions.[18]

Thus Bama refuses to take the next step of explicating her ethical choices as separate from the larger framework of explanation offered by the rhetoric of Dalit emancipatory politics. The last part of the novel, the section most amenable to such a problematization, is instead given as a quick summary. Bama's choice to leave the Church is presented as a foregone conclusion, as a logical next step in a deterministic caste narrative. Thus *Karukku*, too, joins the series of Tamil literary texts that present the Dalit woman as caught and bound by her caste.[19] Bama's refusal to reason out the moral issues involved from a personal point of view (of her own individual feelings, fears, and thoughts) is similar to the Egyptian writer

[18] I need to make it clear that I am not promoting the kind of nativism Ashish Nandy has. The critiques of the postmodernist Derrida are more useful in interrogating the Enlightenment hope that fails Bama. Bama's world is filled with the binaries of Dalit/non-Dalit, male/female, rich/poor, Christian/non-Christian, married/single, etc. Derrida has argued that such binaries privilege one term over the other; Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974).

[19] Manimekhalai is the heroine of the Tamil epic of the same title written by Shattan Cattanar. She is the daughter of Madhavi, the courtesan of an earlier epic, *The Cilappatikaram* of Ilanko Adigal. At the opening of *Manimekhalai,* Madhavi who had stolen the husband of a virtuous woman in the preceding epic of *Cilappatikaram,* has become an ascetic and has convinced her daughter also to take up Buddhism. The listing of Madhavi's talents as a woman of pleasure is the same as that given in the *Kama Sutra* and her decision to give up her *dasi* life style seems unbelievable to her friends. "For a girl destined by birth for art and pleasure to become an ascetic and mortify herself is an impious act. All the scholars and wise men will tell you so, and the entire population of the city condemns Madhavi without pity. To act in defiance of the laws of the city is no virtue. Renounce this behaviour which dishonors us" (5). Manimekhalai's story is a description of the travails that await a beautiful woman born of the courtesan caste who refuses to enter into the dasi way of life. As a learned ascetic, she goes around doing good for the poor and hungry (she gets the king to demolish the city's prison), but is pursued relentlessly by the lust of the young prince who wants to "recall Manimekhalai to her duty"(16). The narrative offers Manimekhalai religion, and more importantly, a magical power as the only means to escape her origins. Shattan Cattanar, *Manimekhalai*, tr. Alain Daniélou (New York: New Directions, 1989).

Nawal El Saadawi's description, in her prison memoir, of the building of a wall.[20] El Saadawi describes the pain of hearing women and children screaming in the cell next to hers as if melted lead were poured into her ears. Interestingly, as Bama does in many parts of *Karukku* and then later consistently in *Sangati*, El Saadawi, too, assumes a 'we' voice, connecting herself to the other women in her cell and telling the whole incident of the wall as a collective tale. El Saadawi and the women in her cell demand that the prison authorities build a wall between the cells so that they need not see or hear the squalor next door. El Saadawi never revisits this incident, even though the description of the building of the wall itself is one of the lighter moments in her memoir. The extended description makes the reader forget that El Saadawi avoids explaining how she understood her mental and physical compartmentalization: we infer that, like the physical wall, she is able to wall off the utter helplessness she feels at the condition of the women and children next door. But we also want to know how she is able to make herself deny them. Is it the terror of the next stage – her cell is bad enough, but what lies across the way is worse – that makes her close her eyes?

In Bama's case, the description she gives of her childhood, when she cowered in fear inside her home as her village was convulsed in caste violence, is a hint of the place she refuses to visit as an adult. She recognizes that there exists the same potential for hatred and violence in the practices of the Church and the school that had grudgingly given her a place. Is it this recognition and her inability to deal with the feelings of childhood terror they evoke that made her leave? She never explains, assuming instead that the reader would agree that any reasonable thinking person would leave the confines of such unjust structures. If her argument holds true, then why aren't more Dalit nuns and priests leaving the Church like Bama? I am not saying that Bama's experience with the Church was unusual and had never happened to another. On the contrary: Bama's narrative is deeply convincing about the structural inequalities and unjust functioning of the Church and its ancillary institutions. What I find troubling is Bama's easy assumption that the reader would accept her choice as made in the name of universal justice rather than as an understandably

[20] Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs From the Women's Prison*, tr. Marilyn Booth (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986).

personal abhorrence of a situation that reminded her of an earlier powerlessness.

Bama's fears of making her choice to leave the Church seem personal and therefore idiosyncratic leads her to present it as a well-reasoned act of rejection. But her description of how her body responded gives us another indication, an insight into the personal dimension of her act. She does not examine the bridge between the private – her feelings of pain and disillusionment, fear of the future, terror at being powerless again, as she once was as a child (for going back home meant precisely that) – and the public spheres (mainly of the ethico-political domain of Dalit liberation politics) of existence. Bama insists on delineating her ethos as a public conscience, of speaking for other voiceless Dalit women, and at such moments the child who picked up the dried palmyra leaf and cut herself on its sharp teeth disappears. I am not arguing that her moral imperatives are wrongheaded. In fact, the novel proceeds to make clear why Bama assumes the particular voice of conscience as the spokesperson for all oppressed Dalits. What I would like is for Bama to explore a dimension of her that is not fully formed by the discourses and practices of a sexist, caste-based regime. For she is more than the sum of her Dalitness, and by refusing to move beyond, she proves the essentialist justifications of those who continue to oppress her in the name of her caste.

One of the blind spots in the novel is its refusal to allow the 'I' of the narration to move away from a singular Dalit identity that becomes increasingly formulaic as the novel progresses. The motif of employing a Greek chorus-like periodic bewailing of being born a Dalit becomes a stock metaphor within the novel. Each time there is the slightest chance of the veil being drawn, the chorus comes out center-stage. By the term 'chorus' I am referring to the conventional, generic language, the large blocks of Dalit liberatory rhetoric that get plugged in to the narrative periodically and, at times, randomly. For instance, there are pages and pages in the latter part of Chapter Two, sandwiched between the incident at school when Bama is falsely accused and Chapter Three, which describes the caste war that took place when Bama was eleven, that are repetitive and generic.

> Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have attributes as a sense of honour and respect? Are they without wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? They treat us in

> whatever way they choose, as if we are slaves who don't even possess human dignity. And if ever a Dalit gets wise to this and wants to live with some honour and self-respect, they jump up and down as if something really outrageous is happening. They seem to conspire to keep us in our place: to think that we who have worked throughout history like beasts, should live and die like that; we should never move on or forward.[21]

The prose is purposefully kept at a distance at these moments. And yet, in the Tamil version, by the employment of a particular vernacular Tamil dialect, immediately familiar and recognizable as a spoken rural Tamil, Bama indicates an openness and a vulnerability that are lost in the translation. It is her voice we hear, crying out at the injustice of it all. Her constant calls to feel empathy for her situation read as more than a rhetorical device; they humanize and erase her situation as a racial Other. The English version, understandably enough, is unable to reproduce this dialect, and thus makes such statements sound like stock rhetoric inserted into the narrative.

The dialect Bama wields functions as an assertive claim to ownership of a collective experience that gets expressed in the appropriate language. The circular narrative structure, the immediacy of the local language, the lack of boundaries drawn between reported speech and dialogue, all serve to point to a personal 'voice' that the repetitive laments of the 'chorus' cannot drown. Actually, the sorrows of the narrator and the dirges of the chorus, so distinctly separated in the English translated version, are blended as one voice in the Tamil version. The translation adopts an adaptive strategy – it makes the complex simple – as a way of dealing with the heterogeneous richness of Bama's Tamil. The looping, gesturing, figurative language of the regional Tamil is made intelligible in English through a massive reduction that takes away the sheer emotive quality of Bama's descriptions and leaves in its place the familiar rhetoric of the Greek chorus. In fact, there are whole sections of the English-language *Karukku* that stay in the mode of the chorus, a wearisome state of affairs, rather like being in an automobile that is unable to shift gears.

The self-distancing one can discern easily in the English translation is much more difficult to locate in the Tamil version of *Karukku*, mostly because of the dialectal Tamil chosen by Bama as most fitting for her tale.

[21] Bama, *Karukku*, 24.

It is not that the subtle variations of language usage become lost in translation – a point reiterated by language theorists like Whorf and Quine who refuse the notion of translation itself; but the necessary reduction brings to light what was not obvious or was only implied in the earlier version. Thus, the claim that the Tamil version has a better explanatory grasp of Bama's intentions is not really true, however much it becomes clear in the English translation that there is such a lack. In both versions, the various conflicts over identity formation in a caste-based society are stated with an inevitability that closes them off to public debate even though these are paradoxical truths that undergird the lived reality of the Dalit. But rather than treating these moments –for instance, the incident involving the battle over cemetery plots between two Dalit groups – as contradictory puzzles to be unpacked and held up to critical scrutiny, the choral form of rhetorical lament treats the caste-based self as a fact of life – unchanging, immutable, written in stone and beyond further analysis.

Mikhail Bakhtin's work in linguistics, which was in opposition to the Saussurean proposal of an abstract language theory, is useful in studying Bama's dialectal Tamil. Bakhtin's work was effective in bringing to light the long unrecognized tradition of a defiantly secular, vernacular language usage that went against the strictures of official discourse. Bakhtin argues that these vernacular languages compete with the centralized, official, political language of the state.[22] In *Karukku* and later in *Sangati* as well, Bama lets loose an inventive, local language that illustrates free play with the limits of spoken language. She trusts the dialect to do the work of personalizing the narrative for her.

The problem with such a dialectal use of language becomes insurmountable when it comes to translation. Lacking a lexicography – a practical model of moving from the usage to a literary semantic version – the translation is forced to summarize into prose what, when translated back, would be into a literary Tamil. Thus, rather than reading *Karukku* as a Tamil novel translated into English, it would be more accurate to read it as a Tamil Dalit novel translated into literary Tamil and then into English. The loss of a regional, spoken dialect transforms the novel in significant ways. The poignancy of Bama's cries of pain in Tamil at being discriminated against and punished for being Dalit, in the English *Karukku* be-

[22] M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, tr. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981).

come the somber pathos of the chorus. The choral voice of “we” that Bama slips into and out of in the Tamil is more a cry of loneliness that comes about at moments of extreme psychological stress when the normal machinery of communication seems to have broken down, rather than the rhetorical device it becomes in English. To read *Karukku* as a ‘Dalit’ novel is possible only in its dialectal Tamil version. It is Bama’s ownership and dexterity of a primarily oral Tamil language of her childhood that identifies the novel as emerging from a particular culture. She chooses to write in this language of her childhood at this particular moment in her life when all the institutionally offered promises have collapsed. The English version recognizes this antinomy and compensates for it by its repeated, rationally stated claims for justice and pity.

The values of Holmström’s English translation of *Karukku* are to create a narrative that is clear, simple, intelligible, and realistic rather than literary in any obvious sense. The simplicity of Bama’s spoken word is taken at face value. The Standard Written English of the translation naturalizes the statements of caste in an unproblematic and uncontested fashion. A close reading of the two stories within Bama’s narrative – the tragedy of Nallathangaal that appears in the first chapter, and the story of the caste fight over cemetery plots that is described in the third chapter – reveals significant differences in terms of interpretation when *Karukku* gets read in its translated version. The lacunae in the narrative in explaining how the two stories are connected to each other or to Bama are obvious in the English version. Nallathangaal is a mythological story, and the other an historical incident, and both clearly survive primarily in an oral tradition – one of the reasons why Bama is able to claim both of them within her vernacular narrative in an effortless fashion. In the English version, the lacunae suggest a sense of incoherence in the narrative; in the Tamil, the gap is hardly felt, as Bama’s vernacular, distinctly oral narrative makes clear her faith in her audience as having the necessary background information to sense the connections between the separate stories.

The tale of Nallathangaal demands to be read as a Dalit tragedy. The minor gods of Hindu folk religion are mostly worshipped by the non-Brahmin castes, and the Dalit origin of the gods (such as the folk hero turned god, Madurai Veeran) rarely precludes the gods from being worshipped by both Dalit and non-Dalit groups. It is at the temples of these folk gods that one sees a coming together of the non-Brahminic castes (the Dalit and non-Dalit castes, who are equally denied entry into the

Brahmin-run inner sanctum of the mainstream Hindu temple), which disproves the unresolvable nature of the Dalit/non-Dalit division. There is a promise of reconciliation between the castes at these moments and spaces that vociferously denies the repeated linguistic and cultural formulations which present difference as insurmountable in the lived reality of the Dalit.[23] A careful reading of *Karukku* shows the caste parameters as policed not by the Brahminic castes but by the non-Dalit groups that live in such close proximity to the Dalit. Yet the folk gods – their very presence as a counter-discourse to the religious and cultural edicts of a caste-based majority Hindu religion – provide moments of correspondence between the non-Brahminic castes. Such moments go against the familiar narrative of caste discrimination and violence promoted by both the dominant culture and the groups fighting for Dalit rights.

The incident involving the cemetery plot is equally problematic, as the violence that is so frightening to the child Bama takes place between two Dalit groups. Once again, the easy demarcations of caste identity become opaque. If Bama in her evocation of this terrible childhood memory attempted to refer to the current condition of random violence against the Dalit body, a fact of lived reality that rarely gets reported in the news media but is memorialized (like the nineteenth-century African American Ida B. Wells' *Red Record* of lynchings in the American South) in alternative forms of Dalit oral literature, all she succeeds in doing is to complicate easy correspondences. The immediate reason for the caste riot, namely, is clearly internecine rivalry between Dalit caste groups and not the usual genocidal behavior of powerful non-Dalit castes toward the Dalit. Thus the re-telling of the incident functions as much more than an example of caste violence. Bama's vernacular Tamil memorializes and creates both dialogue and dialectic between the Nallathangaal legend and the memory of the caste riot.

There is an imaginary social relationship between Nallathangaal and the violent eruption in Bama's village between rival Dalit groups. Significantly, nowhere in her account of Nallathangaal and her tragic suicide does Bama explicitly claim a Dalit origin for her; instead, Bama allows the descriptions of the violence of poverty and discrimination suffered by Nallathangaal to stand in for the sufferings of the Dalit. These causal

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[23] See K.S. Muthu, *Dalit Kula Saamigal* ["The Gods of the Dalits"] (Madurai: Dalit Research Centre, 2004).

elements of Nallathangaal's story are usually subsumed in a re-telling that focusses on the actions of the wicked sister-in-law. As Bama makes clear, the tragedy of Nallathangaal is predicated on her position within the patriarchal family, where, as the married daughter, she has no place in her paternal household. There is no way for the married daughter to come back home: a fact of lived reality that also underlies the tragedy of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Whereas Roy in her novel, ever aware of writing for a global audience, explains in systematic ways the marginalized positions occupied by women and Dalits in Indian society by playing upon the "No locus Standi" that the brother keeps repeating to his sister and her children, Bama makes no such concession to the reader. *Karukku* assumes a Tamil readership capable of making the right connections. One is reminded of Appiah's calls for translations that are not merely word for word correspondences but a 'thick' translation that "seek[s] with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in rich cultural and linguistic context."[24] Lacking such 'thick' descriptions, Holmström's *Karukku* comes across, on the one hand, as a pitiful lament and, on the other, as a rant against caste discrimination.

Bama makes a specific demand on the reader – to validate the personal self (the 'I' of the narrative) by confirming that self's emotions through a process of understanding that is not necessarily linguistic. Her colloquial voice eradicates the distance writing usually brings about, by proclaiming an intimacy that may not necessarily be expressed explicitly in words.[25] Her language is lively, genre-breaking, iconoclastic, and a constant reminder of the speaker. Lacking such a flag-waving signifier, the English translation uses the 'chorus'. And the tacit understandings that Bama depends on are reduced to a straightforward, thematic referential mode in the translation. Bama's vernacular is a linguistic representation of a particular working-class community, despised and constituted as the Other. As Bama herself admits, it was only after the English translation came out and won critical acclaim that renewed attention was paid to her work. When the novel first appeared in Tamil, there were two very different reactions. The Tamil literary scene found the vernacular form of Tamil dis-

[24] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Thick Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000): 425.

[25] See George Gusdorf, *Speaking (La Parole)*, tr. Paul T. Brockleman (Evanston IL: Northwestern UP, 1965).

tasteful, for it is a discourse of class as much as a discourse of caste. Bama's own village community was shocked and offended that she would write about them all. In her interview with me, Bama admitted that her father asked her not to visit her home for fear of reprisal. It was only after the young in the village, doubtless educated in the rising Dalit liberatory politics of the 1990s, began to read *Karukku* that Bama became identified as a Dalit writer.

The local is formalized and universalized in the English version of *Karukku*. As such, it could be moved into regions and situations the novel could not enter in its Tamil version. The same novel that was denied any kind of legitimacy – either as a literary work or as a testimonial – when it was translated into a global language assumed a gravitas and audience hitherto unimagined for a text from a marginalized culture. Michael Cronin, in his deeply absorbing work *Translation and Globalization*, argues that translations harbor the danger of participating in a kind of homogenization, similar to the invisible work done by translators who offer us one-on-one correspondences in terms of all kinds of globalized products, from fast food to blockbuster movies. He argues for the translator to take on "a more self-aware and more activist dimension to the role of the translator in the age of globalization."[26] Like Appiah's call for 'thick' descriptions, Cronin, too, argues for a more creative understanding of the role of the translator.[27] Bama in *Karukku* uses affect as a form of political rhetoric. *Karukku* is not a simple sentimental novel designed to evoke a sense of empathy from the reader. In *Karukku*, we see the private, domestic sphere of Bama's childhood village interrogated by an understanding brought about by her adult experiences in a public world. Yet, in describing her bitter experiences, Bama chooses the language of her childhood

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[26] Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004): 5.

[27] Fredric Jameson's argument about the deep-seated homogenising that occurs within late-capitalist society even as postmodernism focusses on the contingencies, gaps, fissures, conflicts, and disruptions occurring on the surface of society, is useful in studying the ways the narrative subject of *Karruku* makes meaning of her identity within a highly unjust culture. The differences in the English and Tamil versions both point to the ways the subject herself becomes produced within the narrative in certain ways. *Karukku* in its English translation is a package that could be easily carried in and unpacked in non-Tamil-speaking regions, especially in the West. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1991).

and her people. I am reminded of the Colombian artist Fernando Botero's Abu Ghraib paintings, where he takes the unforgettable photographs of the Iraqi torture victims and translates them into his signature bloated bodies. The figures are more real than the photographs, offering a commentary and a way to interpret them that are clearly on the side of the victims. To regard the pain of others, as Susan Sontag reminds us, the photographs by themselves are not enough. We need texts and translations that explain the choices, the multiple points of view, which show us where the gaps are, the corridors, the signposts, the blood of the child whose hand is cut by the palmyra leaf. That is, we need an understanding of language that is not merely formulaic, and translations that refuse easy one-on-one correspondences.

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Translation and the Vernacular

The Tamil Krishna Devotional "Alaippayuthey"

S. SHANKAR

I COME TO A DISCUSSION of the fraught question of engaging with the vernacular literatures of India not only as a literary critic but also as a novelist and translator. These are distinct but complementary designations, and it is from this threefold perspective that I reflect on my translation of Oothakaadu Venkatasubbaiyer's Tamil devotional song "Alaipaayuthey" to see what we might learn about the challenges of engaging with the vernacular literatures of India.

What follows is a set of preliminary observations provoked by the experience of translating "Alaipaayuthey." I focus on how translation involves the transformation of a devotional song into a poem that is and is not the original text. Throughout, I emphasize the plurality of translation practice by drawing attention to the difference between the presentation of the translation in my novel and its appearance here in this brief critical reflection. To my mind, translation is best regarded as a species of interpretation. Approaching translation as interpretation allows us, I believe, to have a more supple and enabling view of it. I am developing this notion at length in the critical work that I am currently doing and in the brief discussion that follows mean to reiterate and further this argument. I conclude my observations on translating "Alaipaayuthey" by reflecting on how the practice of translation relates to the vernacular literatures of India.

I will begin with some background to "Alaipaayuthey" – providing, if you will, a kind of cultural translation of the song in the mode of a literary critic attentive to historical context. Oothakaadu Venkatasubbaiyer lived

during the early part of the eighteenth century in Tamil South India in the Thanjavur area. The first part of his name refers to the village in which he lived – Oothakaadu. Though he is widely accepted as one of the pivotal composers of Karnatic music (South Indian classical music), little is known of his life. He predates the trinity of great Karnatic music composers who lived during the latter half of the eighteenth century – Thyagaraja, Muthusami Dikshitar, and Syama Sastri. He lived when the Vijayanagara Empire had disappeared and before the establishment of British dominance over South India. It was a time of rule by minor kings largely of Maratha origin. Oothakaadu Venkatasubbaiyer's elder brother was the court musician of one such king of Thanjavur and it is through the descendants of this brother that most of the compositions of Oothakaadu Venkatasubbaiyer have survived.

Oothakaadu Venkatasubbaiyer composed in Tamil, Sanskrit, and, very occasionally, in Marathi, the language of the kings of Thanjavur at this time. He was a great Krishna *bhakta*, and though he composed songs about many deities, it is as a composer of devotional songs expressive of an ardent worship of Krishna that he is most celebrated today. Such Krishna compositions as "Aaadaathu Asangaathu" (Immobile) and "Thaiye Yashoda" (Mother Yashhoda) are sung commonly wherever Tamils gather in a religious mood – though it should be acknowledged that there is a strong Brahmin or upper-caste connotation to his songs now. Even when the name of the composer is not known, the compositions themselves are, for they have steadily grown in popularity through the twentieth century and have long since passed into the classical and devotional musical repertoire of Tamils everywhere. Such is the current popularity of the compositions that the celebrated director Mani Ratnam recently named a film "Alaipaayuthey." The film includes a version of the composition by A.R. Rahman, the well-known music composer for contemporary Indian films, especially those in Tamil and Hindi. Thus has a precolonial, religious song arrived at a postcolonial popularity that transcends the religious without escaping it – the song has passed into the sphere of secular culture while remaining unmistakably religious. The past career and present status of "Alaipaayuthey" are part of its 'text' in complex ways; and because they are, the biographical and historical information that I have provided becomes a kind of cultural translation, as indispensable as translation understood in the narrower sense.

I have noted above that Oothakaadu Venkatasubbaiyer's compositions are part of the *musical* repertoire of Tamils. At the same time, I want to say the compositions have become part of Tamil *literary* heritage. Of course, the distinction I am making here, between the musical and the literary, must itself be regarded as suspect in the case of devotional songs. Venkatasubbaiyer's creations are not poems. Nor are they purely musical creations. In them, the literary and the musical are indissolubly linked. Within their native cultural context, the compositions are generally not read in the way a modern poem by Ka Na Su or the twelfth-century classical epic *Ramavataram* by Kamban might be. Rather, they circulate as songs. Nevertheless, I feel the need to invoke the literary in order to direct attention to the peculiar power the words of the songs continue to have, separate from the musical structure in which they appear.

Approaching translation as a literary critic attentive to questions of form and genre, I find the important role the words play in the circulation and the celebration of the songs can be captured for a non-native audience by an appeal to the notion of the literary. I hope it will be understood that I regard the literary as a culturally and historically specifiable category – i.e. that not all cultures or periods of history have a belief in the literary. To refer to the literary quality of "Alaipaayuthey," then, is already to *translate* the text, or to *interpret* the text in a way that shines critical light on specific features of the text to the (temporary) exclusion of other features. Such translation-as-interpretation allows me to demonstrate to non-native audiences that, even as they are musical compositions, there is within these songs a properly literary power.

It was, indeed, out of a deep appreciation of its literary as well as musical power that I translated Oothakaadu Venkatasubbaiyer's "Alaipaayuthey" as "Restless as the Waves of the Ocean" for my novel *No End to the Journey* (2005). In the novel, during a Diwali religious gathering in the Tamil village of Paavalampatti, "Alaipaayuthey" is sung. This is how I translated it for the novel:

Restless as the Waves of the Ocean

Restless as the waves of the ocean, Kanna,
is my mind.
Ebbing and flowing
in the joyous, melodious

song of your flute,
my mind is a restless ocean.

You stand still as an unmovable statue,
unmindful of the passing of time,
O marvelous player of the flute,
while my mind is a restless ocean.

Moon without blemish
burns hot and bright as day.
My brow furrows
from looking toward you in hope.
Your sweet flute song
comes blowing on the wind. Eyes roll helplessly –
dizzy, faint, I am overcome.

You rejoiced so in planting your foot
firmly on my restless mind!
You embraced me in a wild place,
woke my senses, made me bloom!
Like sunlight gleaming
on the resounding ocean waves
gleamed the anklets on your feet!

Is this your wish?
That I cry out like this to you –
wild, my mind liquid with longing –
while still you frolic with your other women?
Is this deserved? proper? just?

Like the earrings that swing
as you play your flute,
my mind swings, suffers,
restless as the waves of the ocean.
Kanna, my mind
is restless as the ocean
in the joyous, melodious
song of your flute.

In the novel, these translated words are not presented continuously as they are here. Rather, they are interwoven with descriptions of characters, their emotions, their responses to the song. The presentation in the novel

dramatizes one particular cultural milieu for the song – the Brahmin gathering, the little village, the Diwali season – in a fuller way than is possible here.

Unlike my presentation of the poem here, in my novel I aim to capture the indissolubility of the song's music and poetry. Musically, "Alaipaayuthey" rises to an impassioned peak in what corresponds to the fourth and fifth stanzas above before returning to a quieter, more reflective, mood in the final. "Alaipaayuthey" is a specific – and common – kind of composition known as a *kriti*. I myself would be the first to admit that this musical aspect of "Alaipaayuthey" – its elaborate structure of a *kriti* – remains largely untranslated, though I hope my translation evokes at least some sense of the musical movement of the original. In the novel, the translation's musical lack is less evident, for the very diegetic presentation of the song emphasizes the musicality of "Alaipaayuthey." Descriptions of the singer's performance surround the translated words. My interest in the novel is that the reader encounter the translated words with, among other things, an acute sense of the integrity of the musical and the literary within this composition, a sense absent when the translation is abstracted from the novel in the way I do it here.

This admission is no matter for embarrassment, for I believe translation practices are happily plural and different kinds of translation practice can be put to different kinds of use. As I have already observed, translation is a form of interpretation. To recognize my translation of "Alaipaayuthey" as interpretation is to free it from useless expectations of fidelity to the original and to begin to appreciate the ways in which translation opens up discussion as much as it shuts it down. Like any interpretation, a specific translation practice directs attention to particular aspects of the original text. If the translation of "Alaipaayuthey" into the diegetic space of a novel permits the emergence of certain emotional and cultural qualities of the original text, the presentation of the same translation here permits other emergences. To render "Alaipaayuthey" as I have above – as a continuous, stand-alone translation: i.e. as a kind of *poem* – is to engage in an interpretation that directs attention to its specifically literary aspects. "Alaipaayuthey" becomes amenable to the kinds of questions that one poses of literary texts, as distinct from songs and chants. Since, in Tamil, "Alaipaayuthey" is not simply a poem, this transformation may be regarded as a mistranslation. I prefer to see it as a kind of interpretation that

focusses attention on what certainly exists in the original Tamil – what may be called, in our context, the literary.

Speaking as a literary critic, then, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that "Alaippayuthey" depends on a contrast between movement and immobility. Thus Krishna is described as "nilai peyaraatha silai" – a statue that does not change its place, an unmovable statue – in contrast to the restless mind of the devotee. Krishna is also described as standing "neram agum theriyamale": that is, unmindful of the passing of time. At the core of the poem is a profoundly philosophical – even mystical – notion of the Divine's exemption from the contingencies of space and time, exactly that to which the restless mind of the Devotee anxiously awaiting the arrival of the beloved Divine is excruciatingly subjected.

Linked to this theme of divine transcendence and mortal contingency is the personal drama of the relationship between the loving but mortal Devotee and the beloved but transcendent Divine. While it is possible to read the statue as a metaphor, as I have done in the previous paragraph, it is certainly also possible to regard the second stanza of the poem as a literal description of the Devotee gazing with an entirely real expectation of movement at his personal idol of Krishna. Here statue is not metaphor, not even statue, but the all too real embodiment of the beloved Divine. Thus, when the Devotee cries "my brow furrows from looking toward you in hope" or asks later whether it is Krishna's wish to keep him waiting, the meaning is both personal and paradoxical. In the form of the statue, the Divine attains a literal and concrete presence that is also at the same time an absence (the Divine after all is busy elsewhere). This paradox is part of the personal anguish expressed in the poem.

To my mind, the greatness of "Alaipaayuthey" (presented here as "Restless as the Waves of the Ocean") inheres in the way it is able to evoke and transcend at one and the same time, in a work dramatizing a personal anguish, two intertwined aspects: the literal and concrete, on the one hand, and the metaphorical and philosophical, on the other. The mind of the mortal Devotee, vast and restless as the ocean, focusses on the Divine, still and unmindful as a statue because the Divine exists in a realm outside the constraints of time and space. In that other realm, the Divine is at play with His lovers. The last part of the song contrasts this play of fulfillment (after all, the Divine, unmindful, shows no *need* to respond to entreaties) to the unfulfilled desire of the Devotee. The song becomes suffused with a properly erotic longing, presented as the relationship between

the Divine gendered as male and the Devotee gendered as female. Such a gendering is conventional, common to the general rhetorical format of the devotional song, and though Oothakaadu Venkatasubbaiyer's identity as a male composer/poet provides an opening to raise a series of questions about the nature of these conventions, I will not develop this observation further here.

Above, I have repeatedly noted that the translation of the devotional song "Alaipaayuthey" into the poem "Restless as the Waves of the Ocean" can be regarded as an enabling act of interpretation that draws attention to specific aspects of the original text. I would like to round out this positive assessment by noting the challenges of translation. At the opening of "Alaipaayuthey" and throughout the poem appears the word *manam*, which I have translated as 'mind' – an English cognate that suggested itself to me as if self-evidently. Upon further reflection, though, 'mind' seems inadequate in many ways, because it implies reason in a manner that does not correspond to the resonances that *manam* has in Tamil. 'Mind' is indeed one of the dominant meanings of *manam*. It is the first meaning that you will encounter for *manam* if you consult a Tamil-to-English dictionary. At the same time, it means desire. *Manam* is resonant of 'heart'; it is a word implying not only thought but emotion. Indeed, the more I consider the matter, the point is precisely that in *manam* thought and emotion are irrevocably connected. Perhaps because as a language English makes a much more rigorous separation of heart from mind, emotion from thought, no English word seems adequate. What English word could ever overcome the challenges to translating *manam*? Words such as 'spirit' and 'soul' commit the translation to an ontology that is absent from *manam*. They also run the opposite risk of undervaluing the way *manam* implies 'mind'.

Because of the differences between languages, then, what can get lost in the translation of *manam* as 'mind' is the way in which the absence of the Divine is both a rational and an emotional dilemma for the Devotee. The restlessness of the Devotee is not only a matter of the mind, of comprehension, but also of the heart, of desire. The loss in meaning implied here is certainly worth noting as a cautionary reminder of the difficulty of translation; at the same time, it is also worth observing that the challenge of translation is often met and solved not word by word but at the level of the text as a whole. Taken as a whole, I hope "Restless as the Waves of

the Ocean" conveys the emotional implications more fully and thus makes up for the lack in the word 'mind'.

Like any other kind of interpretation, translation is never a finished matter. Translating three hundred years later a precolonial, non-secular Tamil devotional song such as "Alaipaayuthey" into the English-language poem "Restless as the Waves of the Ocean" suggests how historically conditioned and philosophically complicated an act translation truly is on so many levels – of genre, language, form, cultural knowledge, theme, and so on. And yet, despite its dangers and complexities, I hope it is evident from my observations that I regard translation as full of opportunity rather than simply as a practice to be approached in a shame-faced and apologetic mood. In the debates over the relative merits of literature in different languages in India, translation has an inevitable role to play. While there will always be an incontestable place for those who know the vernacular languages and read the texts of those languages in the original, translation must suffice for those who cannot. Translation can never take the place of the original text, but that does not mean that it cannot, when approached in an historically sensitive manner, effectively and ethically convey for non-native audiences aspects of the original text. Indeed, translation as interpretation can go further and allow even native readers to appreciate anew aspects of the text that they thought they knew so well in the original. Translating "Alaipaayuthey," for example, has left me with a fresher understanding of its literary and philosophical qualities. I suspect many native speakers of Tamil familiar with this devotional will be led to reflect anew on it, whether in a spirit of agreement or of disagreement, in the light of my translation. This, too, is an important form of knowing.

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Interview:
S. Shankar Speaking with Nalini Iyer

Nalini Iyer: In your essay "Midnight's Orphans,"[1] *you present the idea of vernacular postcolonialism as a response to Rushdie's 1997 comment on vernacular literature in India as parochial, and eloquently show how modern Tamil writers such as Ka Na Su and Ambai embrace a modernity in their writing. As a novelist, how do you engage with this vernacular postcolonial sensibility through English?*

S. Shankar: What I was trying to do in that essay is recognize a way of thinking about 'vernacular' that takes account of the fact that it is also a sensibility. In that essay, I contrast the vernacular with its focus on the rooted, the culturally autonomous, and the local to the transnational with its focus on the diasporic, the hybrid, and the global. Too often, vernacular is used pejoratively, but I wanted to go beyond the routine disparagement of the vernacular. I wanted to recognize the ways in which articulations of rootedness, the local, and cultural autonomy can take complicated and varied forms, which are sometimes (though not always) worth celebrating. Having made this argument as a critic, as a novelist working in English I was interested in exploring this same vernacular sensibility in ways only fiction can – that is, I was interested in showing the ways in which people who don't, for whatever reasons, automatically espouse those values that Rushdie does, nevertheless have meaningful lives worth paying attention to.

In the ten years between the publication of your two novels, there seems to be a distinct shift in your sensibility as a novelist. I would characterize A Map of Where I Live,[2] *as a novel which rewrites Swift's* Gulliver's Travels, *as being in the 'empire writes back' mode and* No End to the Journey[3] *as one which engages Tamil sensibility in English. What accounts for this shift?*

In a word, translation. Between these two novels, I translated the full-length Tamil play *Thaneer, Thaneer* by Komal Swaminathan into English.

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[1] S. Shankar, "Midnight's Orphans or A Postcolonialism Worth its Name," *Cultural Critique* 56 (2004): 64–95.

[2] S. Shankar, *Map of Where I Live* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1996).

[3] S. Shankar, *No End to the Journey* (New York: Steerforth, 2006).

Perhaps it would be better to say I stumbled into translating the play. I was doing research for another project and found that this seminal play had, amazingly enough, remained untranslated. What that act of translating the play did was teach me that there were aspects of postcolonial life that remained largely unrepresented in English-language literature. I want to emphasize the "largely," because I don't want to be misunderstood as making a reductive argument about language – as saying that writers in English are incapable of depicting some realities. That is not true at all. Rather, what is at issue here is a matter of reading audiences and publishing contexts. If you are the kind of writer who has only a certain kind of reader and publisher in mind, then you have a prejudice toward only certain kinds of issues and perspectives. You overlook other aspects of postcolonial life. Anyhow, to return to the main point I want to make in response to your question.… Translating the Tamil play was my first encounter with what I later came to call a vernacular postcolonial sensibility. That's the difference between the two novels. I wanted to see, in my second novel, how I could, while writing in English – that is, writing for certain readers within certain publishing contexts – do justice to what I am calling the 'vernacular'. I don't think this amounts to a rejection of what I was doing in *A Map of Where I Live*. I think of it more as a shifting of focus.

On the subject of No End to the Journey, *what led you to choose "Alaipaayuthey" in particular? After all, there are many very popular songs and composers you could have chosen. Would a Thyagaraja* kriti[4] *in Telugu translated into this novel's world have achieved similar novelistic goals? Or is there something specific about a Tamil devotional that serves a specific function in the novel? In other words, is a Telugu song always already translated in a Tamil world?*

The choice of "Alaipaayuthey" was mainly driven by how well I already knew the song. In the scene in which the translation appears, I was interested in conveying the turmoil in the protagonist Gopalakrishnan's mind

[4] A *kriti* is a canonical form in Karnatic (South Indian) classical music and consists of three distinct parts: the *pallavi*, the *anupallavi*, and *charanam*. Thyagaraja, an eighteenth-century Telugu composer in the *bhakti* tradition, has composed many *kritis* in praise of Rama which, along with the works of Muthuswami Dikshitar, Syama Shastri, and Swati Thirunal, form the core of the canon for Karnatic musicians' performances even today.

while also conveying the specifically Tamil Brahmin context in which we find him. For this dual purpose, the song served admirably.

On the question of whether a *kriti* composed by Tyagaraja would have served the purpose as well – for one thing, I don't know Telugu and so could not have translated it the way I did translate "Alaipaayuthey." And, yes, the status of a Tyagaraja *kriti* within the world depicted in the novel would be different because it would be in Telugu – a South Indian language, but quite distinct from Tamil. I don't want to press this point too far, though. In all kinds of ways, Tyagaraja has been made an integral part of Tamil Brahmin culture. So a Tyagaraja *kriti* could have fit in quite well too. The issue is more my personal knowledge.

In your essay on "Alaipaayuthey" in this book, you write of the opportunities that translation provides us to read texts through a critic's perspective. What were the challenges of translating a poem from Tamil with its own poetic aesthetic (form, meter) into English and its aesthetic tradition?

The challenges were tremendous. As I hope is clear from what I wrote for this anthology, there are all too many dimensions of the song that remain untranslated in the English version that I produced. In the English version, I concentrated on what I regard as the literary core of the song. I did not make any other than a superficial attempt to reproduce the song-ness of "Alaipaayuthey." Even as I acknowledge this, I am wary of being misunderstood. I don't want to be in the position of saying that translation is an impossible activity, that it inevitably ends in failure. Yes, there are aspects of "Alaipaayuthey" that remain untranslated (in this case, its songness). On the other hand, there are aspects that do get translated, and along with other forms of commentary (such as the very comment I am making here) much does manage to get conveyed. Here is where translation becomes a kind of critical activity, a kind of exercise in critical interpretation. Translation is a kind of interpretation. Recognizing this simple but perhaps difficult-to-see point would get rid of many of the misconceptions about translation. Just as in critical interpretation – what we do when we write as literary critics – we do not expect all aspects of a text to be covered, so, too, we should not expect a translation to convey everything in the text being translated. What is important to ask is whether what is conveyed is done so in a manner that is commensurate with the text being translated.

As an English-language writer living in North America and writing about India, do you have multiple audiences even though the language is English? In other words, do English speakers in India read/respond to your work differently than do non-Indian English language readers?

Absolutely. "Multiple audiences" is the right way to put it. I don't have much patience with those novelists who like to say they never have audiences in mind when they write. Of course, they do – saying a writer is always aware of an audience is just another way of saying a writer is always in a particular rhetorical situation. Who ever heard of writing that did not take place within a specific rhetorical situation? My rhetorical situation as a novelist is one which has different audiences in it. My novels have been published outside India, but I do have an English-language readership within India also in mind when I write. This does not mean that I am aware of these audiences every moment of composition but, rather, that before the book is done it is partly shaped by what I take to be my rhetorical situation.

Regarding the second part of your two-part question, I think different readers from different areas of the world do respond differently – and here difference is not good or bad, it does not mean that one kind of response is better than the other. Sometimes the response of a reader in one part of the world is revealing and useful, sometimes that of a reader in another. At least partly, readers read out of their own experiences. I am simply noting the obvious here – both inside India and outside, English-language readers are of many different kinds. There is no point in looking for authenticity, whether inside or outside India.

As a translator, you have published your translation of Komal Swaminathan through Seagull Press in India and in Asian Theater Journal. *What do you observe about the market for translations from 'vernacular' writing outside India. Do you see yourself publishing translations of Tamil writing for a non-Indian audience?*

I think here again – on this issue of translation of what you call vernacular literature – there is great variety. For some time now I have been trying to get my agent to sell a collection of novellas from three Indian languages translated into English to a trade publisher – without success. Within the USA, there is very little interest in translated literature, and most especially when it is non-European. This situation is quite deplorable, given what is going on in the world. Now, after 9/11, there is a kind of tokenistic

interest in certain parts of the world; even more deplorable. My impression is that the situation is quite different in other parts of the world. In India, of course, there is a fair amount of translation into English, much less so into other Indian languages – in its own way, again deplorable; because, ideally, translation should flow freely in all directions.

Personally, I find translation challenging at the level of craft and stimulating at the level of intellectual engagement (that is, at the level of the ideas it provokes in me). I certainly would like to do more of it, whether for Indian or for non-Indian audiences. I am committed enough to translation and learn enough from it that I am sure I will do it again. I find that translation makes me grow in different ways. To not translate would be to remain untranslated, and what kind of fate would that be in a world full of translation?

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Real-Life Transfers

Reading Literature Through Translation

CHRISTI A. MERRILL

> What world is given to us through language, and how might the alteration of our language give us a different sense of world?[1]
>
> To revise the problem of global space from the postcolonial perspective is to move the location of cultural difference away from the space of demographic *plurality* to the borderline negotiation of cultural translation.[2]

THAT THE ANGLOPHONE WRITER Salman Rushdie has become representative of Indian literature more generally and of translation in particular has a certain sweet irony to it we cannot fail to appreciate. How else are we to read his now famous public identification with the group of diasporic "translated men" he insists are not so much "lost" as "found," in contrast to his dismissal of the work being done "in the eighteen 'recognized' languages of India, the so-called 'vernacular languages'" in his selection of and introduction to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947–1997* with Elizabeth West?[3] S. Shankar is

[1] Judith Butler, "Values of Difficulty," in *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, ed. Jonathan Culler & Kevin Lamb (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 2003): 202–203.

[2] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 223.

[3] The first reference is to his essay "Imaginary Homelands," in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (New York: Granta/Viking Penguin, 1991):

indeed right to point out that Rushdie's rejection, in this instance, of much Indian literature in translation underscores more than anything an entrenched hierarchy in our field.[4] Shankar makes a useful distinction between what he terms a "transnational postcolonialism" – favored by critics such as Homi Bhabha, Ania Loomba, and Leela Gandhi – and a "vernacular postcolonialism" that gets scant critical attention by North American scholars, and cautions us not to follow Bhabha's example, in particular, of treating the latter category as falsely authentic, parochial and static, nor to see the two categories as polar opposites.[5] Instead, he proposes working out a critical liminal zone he describes, in somewhat utopian terms, at the close of his essay as a "threshold" space, and in the process implicitly suggests that the two contradictory approaches to translation I have associated with Rushdie could be thought of instead as part of a continuum of concerns endemic to postcolonial criticism:

> The careful distinctions to be made between vernacular and cosmopolitan sensibilities, the importance of translation as practice and as trope in the postcolonial context, the felicities and fallibilities of comparativism as a methodology capable of drawing into critical light hitherto ignored aspects of the postcolonial, the place of the vernacular within the national imaginary – it is at the threshold of these and other issues that we have now arrived. It remains to be seen exactly what stepping across the threshold will bring.[6]

While I agree with him wholeheartedly, I would go a step further into this critical liminal zone he proposes and suggest that the effort to assess the ways translation as a trope and as a critical practice is deployed in postcolonial studies will help us understand our ethical engagements with literary texts that cross any conventionally understood lines distinguishing the transnational and the vernacular. This assessment offers, in turn, a way of understanding the relationship of the vernacular to cosmopolitan

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19, and the latter to Rushdie's and West's "Introduction" to *Mirrorwork*, ed. Elizabeth West (New York: Henry Holt, 1997): x.

[4] S. Shankar, "Midnight's Orphans, Or a Postcolonialism Worth Its Name," *Cultural Critique* 56 (Winter 2004): 64–95. It should be noted that in recent years Salman Rushdie has begun actively and publicly promoting Indian literature in translation, in interviews, and public forums through PEN.

[5] See Shankar, "Midnight's Orphans," 88–89.

[6] Shankar, "Midnight's Orphans," 89.

sensibilities, the felicities and fallibilities of comparativism as a methodology, as well as "the place of the vernacular within the national imaginary."[7] We might see evidence of this by referring to the one literary text translated from an Indian 'vernacular' that Rushdie and West regard as exceptional enough to include in their collection: what they call a "masterpiece," the short story "Toba Tek Singh," published in 1953 by the Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto and rendered into English by Khalid Hasan in 1987.[8]

"Toba Tek Singh" follows the plight of a Sikh man named Bishan Singh as he and the other non-Muslim inmates of an insane asylum in Pakistan are to be transferred to an asylum in India shortly after 1947. We know from the first sentence of the Hasan translation that the post-Independence identitarian logic of this transfer of bodies should be considered to be as questionable as the entire premise of Partition:

> A couple of years after the Partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. Muslim lunatics in India should be transferred to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums should be sent to India. Whether this was a reasonable or unreasonable idea is difficult to say. One thing, however, is clear. It took many conferences of important officials from the two sides to come to this decision. Final details, like the date of actual exchange, were carefully worked out. Muslim lunatics whose families were still residing in India were to be left undisturbed, the rest moved to the border for the exchange. The situation in Pakistan was slightly different, since almost the entire population of Hindus and Sikhs had already migrated to India. The question of keeping non-Muslim lunatics in Pakistan did not, therefore, arise.[9]

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[7] My forthcoming book *The Play of Translation: Indian Literature and Other Riddles of Community* makes this argument in some detail.

[8] Rushdie and West, "Introduction" to *Mirrorwork*, x. They announce that they scanned a wide range of literature "to make the best possible selection from what is presently available in the English language, including, obviously, work in translation" and yet, the result was that "to our considerable astonishment, only one translated text, S.H. Manto's masterpiece, the short story 'Toba Tek Singh,' made the final cut." For the original Hasan translation, see *Kingdom's End and Other Stories* (London & New York: Verso, 1987).

[9] Manto, "Toba Tek Singh," 11.

The narrator in this version quietly and affectionately mocks the logic of the state – here now doubled, split between the governments of India and Pakistan – that would assume a simple, stable equivalence between the situations of prisoners and of the insane on the two sides of the newly formed border. As English-language readers in particular, we should note that the discussion of the bodily transfer of prisoners assumes not only a situational equivalence between the prisoners and insane of the two nations, but also a linguistic equivalence between the (ostensibly sane, non-imprisoned) government officials that would allow such a conversation to take place. The scene thus allows us to talk about the ethics of translation both in terms of bodily transfer (what Bhabha and others refer to as "cultural translation") and as "interlingual transfer." When the narrator admits that he is unsure "whether this was a reasonable or unreasonable idea," he opens up the possibility that the very premise of such translations – as both bodily transfer and interlingual transfer – may offer no easy answers of right and wrong. What, after all, would be the right way to read such a story?

In a perceptive article taking a self-announced "Indian perspective" on translation theory, G.N. Devy identifies the ambiguous terms of these types of exchanges as typical of a multilingual society such as India's. "An Indian student of literature finds himself precariously hanging," he explains, in tropes as liminal as Shankar's, "between a literary metaphysics which rules out the very possibility of translation and a literary ethos where translation is becoming increasingly important."[10] The protagonist of "Toba Tek Singh," for one, is shown wandering in his own liminal zone, as much linguistic as existential: "Whenever he spoke, it was the same mysterious gibberish: *'Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the deal of the laltain'*."[11] We see all too pointedly in

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[10] G.N. Devy, "Translation Theory: An Indian Perspective," in Devy, *In Another Tongue: Essays on Indian English Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993): 134.

[11] Manto, "Toba Tek Singh," 14. We might argue that this string of "gibberish" contains words in Hindustani and English, or in Hindi, Urdu, Panjabi and English. Elsewhere I argue that the very attempt to transliterate the syllables into Roman letters and to assign them to discrete language systems, enacts in part the linguistic partition of Hindi and Urdu that accompanied the founding of two separate states as part of the nationalist movement for Independence from British rule. (See "Partitioning Sense and Nonsense," in *The Play of Translation.*)

this work of fiction that to deny the possibility of translation is to deny this character a right to exist in all his multilinguality. How might we link Rushdie's triumphant embrace of his status of translated man to this example of double translation, where the existential and linguistic are inseparable?

Devy insists that, given that in India "the bulk of literature to us comes through translation," these exchanges are crucial to investigate, for they have become the site of an "overwhelming zeal" in the Indian literary context as the "polylingualism inherent in Indian culture is seeking to express itself through [...] literary translation."[12] To this end, he suggests instead that Indians embrace what he (apologizing for its "crude manner of differentiating") calls their "translating consciousness."[13] Rather than denying the possibility of translation, a critical awareness of these issues of liminality would "exploit [...] the potential openness of language systems" by challenging the monolingualism inherent in much of the European-language-focused theorizing of "inter-lingual synonymity."[14] The monolingual view, Devy claims, "looks offensively at translation [... as] an attempt to rescue significance from one system of signs and to wed it with another such system."[15] Rather than view translation as a strict transgression of discrete, monolingual domains, he suggests that we look at the way it often operates more fluidly as a "merger of sign systems" in the individual multilingual consciousness. Such an approach would have us recognize our own ideological complicity with, for example, a state call to locate Bishan Singh and his "gibberish" officially on one side of the border or another (separating sane from insane, Muslim from non-Muslim, but also English from Hindustani.) After all, the narrator of "Toba Tek Singh" offers a sympathetic account of the main character, a man who has become lost in the confusion of so much partitioning:

> Recently, he had started to listen carefully to discussions about the forthcoming exchange of Indian and Pakistani lunatics. When asked his opinion, he observed solemnly: "*Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the Government of Pakistan.*" Of late, however, the Government of Pakistan had been replaced by the

[12] Devy, "Translation Theory," 134–35.

[13] Devy, "Translation Theory," 135.

[14] Devy, "Translation Theory," 141.

[15] Devy, "Translation Theory," 140.

> Government of Toba Tek Singh, a small town in the Punjab which was his home. He had also begun enquiring where Toba Tek Singh was to go. However, nobody was quite sure whether it was in India or in Pakistan.[16]

By pretending to accept the terms of Partition, the narrative reveals the unreasonableness of a system that would make such absolute demands of identifications on citizens who do not fit so neatly into such discrete categories. Read in Devy's terms, we might see that the story calls into question the assumption that Bishan Singh's multilinguality should be easily dismissed as mere "gibberish" and thus that his perspective – one of "translating consciousness" – has no insights to offer into Partition. If we can only read a story such as this according to narrow-minded, nation-based categories of language, culture, and ethnicity, we then reinforce the very categories the story is calling into question. The story shows that questions of interlingual transfer are bound up in more existential dilemmas of rights (again, what Bhabha refers to as "cultural translation") and that the concerns of vernacular literature – –as Shankar has proven already in his examples of Tamil literature – evidence their own "cosmopolitan sensibilities." The vernacular assumes such a fraught place within the national imaginary that comparativism as a methodology in North America is oftentimes unable to handle it.

We see this most clearly when we consider the character's uncertainty about where to locate his home town on this newly partitioned map ("where Toba Tek Singh was to go"), for the confusion over place soon becomes synonymous with his own plight, and instead of "Bishan Singh" he begins to be called "Toba Tek Singh" as well. In the end, his insistent question about his own home and identity – Where was Toba Tek Singh to go? – does not resolve neatly but instead works to reveal the deeper ironies of modern, nationalist-minded thinking on translation issues:

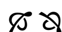
> When Bishan Singh was brought out and asked to give his name so that it could be recorded in a register, he asked the official behind the desk: 'Where is Toba Tek Singh? In India or Pakistan?'
>
> 'Pakistan,' he answered with a vulgar laugh.
>
> Bishan Singh tried to run, but was overpowered by the Pakistani guards who tried to push him across the dividing line towards India.

[16] Manto, "Toba Tek Singh," 14.

> However, he wouldn't move. 'This is Toba Tek Singh,' he announced. '*Uper the gur gur the annexe the be dhyana mung the dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan*.'
>
> Many efforts were made to explain to him that Toba Tek Singh had already been moved to India, or would be moved immediately, but it had no effect on Bishan Singh. The guards even tried force, but soon gave up.
>
> There he stood in no man's land on his swollen legs like a colossus.[17]

How might we redefine translation to read this moment of liminality with the complexity and ambiguity it deserves?

I would like to start addressing this question by acknowledging a perhaps obvious assumption we often make but never state as crassly as I'm about to: that those writing in a global language such as English – –be the writer a translator like Salman Rushdie or like Khalid Hasan – are performing their work on a global stage with the full expectation that they will be judged by those ethical standards and tastes being formed and contested in the very act of these performances. It points to a curious interpretative loop that many discuss quite helpfully under the name of 'translation' – whether we understand 'translation' in the literal sense of interlingual transfer, or in the metaphoric sense referred to above. While the two concerns over such interpretative loops have much in common, it must be admitted that scholars of interlingual transfer have more readily adopted the insights of 'cultural translation' than has been the reverse. Such a trend says much about our institutional hierarchies, of course. But that is not all. In the remaining paragraphs I would like to point out the expertise in "borderline negotiations" (as Bhabha has it) the two camps have in common as a way of demonstrating the particular skills in interpretation which the latter might learn from the former. My interest is in demonstrating further the fact that formal questions of interlingual transfer have an ethical component worth inquiring into.



To begin, it might be helpful to understand the particular contribution the cultural translation approach has made to our discussions of translation

[17] Manto, "Toba Tek Singh," 18.

studies. Prominent scholars of literature in translation such as Susan Bassnett and Lydia Liu have celebrated what they call the "cultural turn" literary studies has taken: by this we can understand them to mean an increased attention to what is culturally and politically relevant in the literature one reads. In the field of literary studies generally, the feeling has been that the conventions of a resolute and focussed formalism have not adequately responded to the current issues of the day – whether we have in mind, for instance, discrimination against migrant groups in their newly adopted countries, or the communal violence experienced by those who have been in the same place for generations. There has been a conviction that attention to such issues of "cultural translation" might help us understand our basest tendencies as human beings to physically and sometimes violently separate ourselves from others. In the work not just of Bhabha but also of Judith Butler and Robert Young, translation as a metaphor has been hailed as a rubric for the ways we might come together in all our differences. And while I am generally supportive of such an ideal, my training in literary translation has taught me to be skeptical, particularly of readings which – inadvertently and perhaps unthinkingly – insist on fidelity to a single, stable original. While less overt, in the case of cultural translation, the tendency has often been to find the elusive relevance we seek by being attentive (even faithful) to the bodily welfare of the suffering migrant (as an abstract generality), in the name of an equally elusive sense of justice. My concern is that, in practice, such a move serves to 'fix' those living bodies as surely as literary texts were once fixed in the colonial era. After all, Bishan Singh is a victim of precisely this fixed approach to translation.

I realize this is perhaps one of the most egregious oversights a postcolonial critic can be charged with. Since the days of Edward Said's widely influential polemic, *Orientalism*, we have been careful to distance ourselves from the practice of Orientalism, which, in his words, "depends for its strategy on [a] flexible *positional* authority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" and in the process evidences "a proclivity to divide, subdivide, and redivide its subject matter without ever changing its mind about the Orient as being always the same, unchanging, uniform."[18] In *Siting Translation*, Tejaswini Niranjana has applied this

[18] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979): 7, 98.

Saidian critique to translation most particularly, charging that "translation participates – across a range of discourses – in the *fixing* of colonized cultures, making them seem static and unchanging rather than historically constructed."[19] She picks as one example the work of the prototypical eighteenth-century Orientalist William Jones, whose translations (Kalidas's play "Shakuntala" and the Hindu code book *The Laws of Manu*) helped shape British administrative attitudes towards their colonized subjects in the critical early days of empire building. Jones's work, Niranjana charges, assumes that Indians are "unreliable interpreters of their own laws and cultures" and as a result need someone like Jones who can identify their laws for them as their own, and therefore need an expert such as himself who can work to "purify Indian culture" in such a way that allows him to "speak on its behalf."[20] Niranjana makes clear in her discussion that she does not believe Jones lived up to such idealistic aims. Her work thus implicitly raises the fundamental question: How might one translate in such a way that would allow a culture to speak instead on its own behalf? – that would, for example, allow Bishan Singh to speak on his own behalf?

Niranjana's methodology suggests that answering such a question is not only a subtle but also an exceedingly personal and internal matter – one of discerning the attitude the translator has toward his subject matter. To this end, Niranjana analyzes not so much the language of Jones's actual translations as the "outwork" (as she calls it) of public and private writings that helps shed light on his translation process. She reveals, for example, Jones confiding in a letter to a friend that he finds the Hindus "incapable of civil liberties," since "few of them have an idea of it, and those, who have, do not wish it."[21] This and other comments make it clear that he fancies himself teacher both to the English on behalf of the Indians and to the Indians on their own behalf. *Siting Translation* offers an impassioned, intelligently probing protest against such a presumptuous attitude. Rather than uncritically accept the terms laid out by these translation projects, she suggests that, as inheritors of such traditions, we analyze more carefully the historical circumstances that gave rise to them, and in

[19] Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, 3.

[20] *Siting Translation*, 13.

[21] *Siting Translation*, 14, citing *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, ed. Garland Cannon (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970): 712.

the process acknowledge the ongoing and active participation required for a project such as Jones's to maintain its political and cultural momentum – or what Walter Benjamin famously refers to (in Harry Zohn's English translation) as the "afterlife" of a text.[22]

Rather than describe the relationship of translation to original in terms of a straightforward, linear narrative, as the figure "afterlife" might imply, Niranjana insists that "what Benjamin seems to be implying in speaking of an afterlife is 'the continued life' of the text rather than a life to *follow* its death."[23] The stakes of such life-and-death metaphorizations for present-day discussions of human rights and justice are very high indeed.[24] The question is what our role should be as scholars who contend with such afterlives. Niranjana reads "The Task of the Translator" essay in relation to Benjamin's other work in order to argue that "This idea [of translation as "continued life"] is echoed in his later conception of how a past era is a *Jetzzeit* [present time] brought into a constellation with our own, a spark of hope seized from the past." In so doing, Niranjana creates a space for critically active readers of translation to revitalize the tradition in a more ethical manner and thus to uncover their own spark of hope seized from the past.

For Niranjana, such hope lies in proving that these cultural texts do not come down to us as timeless and fixed, and need to be read as fragmentary and open to ongoing contestation. Early in her book, she challenges convention by proclaiming that "Translation functions as a transparent presentation of something that already exists, although the 'original' is actually brought into being through translation."[25] In so doing, she announces that the potential for agency lies not so much in the work of a translator such as Jones once upon a time, as in the active, critical engagement of the reader of such translations today – a reader such as herself. Later, she makes it clear that she sees the means for realizing this agency in what she calls "a nonrepresentational theory of translation and historiography" that is "no longer concerned with recovering the past as it really

[22] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations,* tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968): 71; see Niranjana's discussion of "*Nachreife*" as "afterlife" versus "continued life," *Siting Translation*, 134.

[23] Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, 134.

[24] I pursue this point at some length in *The Play of Translation: Indian Literature and Other Riddles of Community.*

[25] Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, 3.

was" but instead in offering a reading "interventionist and strategic" that uncovers "the figure of historicity as a translation of translation."[26] Elsewhere she maintains that it is "translation's historicity that permits us to uncover in detail the instability of the original."[27] In so doing, she opens up the very definition of translation, so that there is no longer a clear distinction between the work of an interpreter of cultural texts such as Jones who engages in interlingual transfer and the work of an interpreter of cultural texts such as Niranjana who historicizes – not so much epistemologically, as she insists, but politically, strategically – these same texts. Such a move helps us see why those engaged in the project of "cultural translation" have much in common with those involved in translation as interlingual transfer.

And yet, such an intervention does not clarify the basis upon which we might compare Niranjana's translation-as-interpretation with a translation (understood in the more conventional sense) by Jones. What is the right way to read a translation? Her conclusions do not help us adequately answer the fundamental question raised by her own book: How might one translate in such a way that would allow a culture to speak on its own behalf? The very project of rendering the original unstable leads us to ask attendant questions of identity that are fundamental to such a line of inquiry: can a culture ever be understood to be speaking on its own behalf? How might such an entity be defined, circumscribed? And if one could speak for it, then who is authorized to speak thus? Authorized by whom, according to what protocol?



Judith Butler addresses such impossible ethical quandaries similarly with reference to the rubric of translation. In the essay "Values of Difficulty," for example, Butler uses as her historical example not the encounter of an Orientalist like William Jones and a generalized Indian colonial subject, but a specific and well-documented editorial argument between Walter Benjamin and his editor, Theodor Adorno, that, Butler implies, resulted in Benjamin losing his life. She generalizes the lessons to address questions raised about the role of the academic in interpreting difficult life

[26] Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, 162.
[27] *Siting Translation*, 133.

questions. This particular essay is included in a volume edited by Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb called *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, which was put together in response to Butler's receiving the notorious and highly controversial Bad Writing Award from the crotchety journal *Philosophy and Literature*. Culler and Lamb use the occasion to inquire more generally into "the status of the humanities, which is conceived not as a realm where specialized or recondite reflection is needed but as a set of disciplines devoted to transmitting cultural heritage."[28] Culler and Lamb object elegantly and forcefully to the notion that literature functions simply to transmit cultural heritage and is so transparent as to need no disciplined expertise to interpret it. While they themselves do not draw on such metaphors, their concerns should make it clear to us how the insistence on a fixed original ("transmitting cultural heritage") might be dangerous even within a culture that conceives of itself as monolingual and homogeneous.

In "Values of Difficulty," Butler masterfully alternates between seemingly deliberate uses of past tense and present tense in her own prose to think through, as Niranjana does, the relationship of the present to the past, which involves focussing on an era in which "the question of language became central to the rethinking of social reality."[29] However extraordinary the historical example of the relationship between Adorno and Benjamin may at first appear, she soon makes it clear that its lessons apply to our present-day performances of even day-to-day concerns for human rights. She explains (in the present tense): "Language not only communicates to us about a ready-made world but gives us a world, and gives it to us or, indeed, withholds it from us by virtue of the terms it uses."[30] And so the ensuing question, she suggests, becomes critical to ask: "What world is given to us through language, and how might the alteration of our language give us a different sense of world?"[31] Like Niranjana, she points to a complex relationship between power and dis-

[28] Jonathan Culler & Kevin Lamb, "Introduction: Dressing Up, Dressing Down," in *Just Being Difficult?*, ed. Culler & Lamb (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 2003): 2.

[29] Butler, "Values of Difficulty," in *Just Being Difficult?*, ed. Culler & Lamb, 202.

[30] "Values of Difficulty," 202.

[31] "Values of Difficulty," 202–203.

course when she asks of the Adorno–Benjamin encounter: "Who was speaking there?"[32]

Here and elsewhere, Butler equates the metaphor of speaking with the trope of translation in order to think through the ways the promise of 'universality', which "should include all people [, ...] is regularly misunderstood by those it describes, or refused by those it includes, or used in syntactical ways that are incompatible with other such uses."[33] After all, a translation project like William Jones's was premissed on the notion that there might be a universal understanding that all people could speak to and from: the very allowances he made for the differences that inevitably arose were precisely the ones that so galled Niranjana, for one. It is this unequal application of the logic of 'equivalence' that so many scholars of colonial translation point to when alerting us to the inherent asymmetry of such promises of universality. As a result, for a period not just scholars of colonial translation but also many scholars of conscience dismissed the notion of universality, hence the possibility of translation, out of hand. But then they soon realized that there might be a strategic interest in recuperating it, revising it. We see this change of heart in the work of Butler: four years before the publication of "Values of Difficulty," in her revised, 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* she admits that she had previously been entirely pessimistic about the value of such humanistic projects:

> In the [first printing of the] book, I tend to conceive of the claim of "universality" in exclusive negative and exclusionary terms. However, I came to see the term has important strategic use precisely as a non-substantial and open-ended category as I worked with an extraordinary group of activists [... in] an organization that represents sexual minorities on a broad range of human rights issues. There I came to understand how the assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet

[32] Butler, "Values of Difficulty," 204. See also her equation between speaking, universality and translation in "Restaging the Universal," Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau & Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000): 39.

[33] Butler, "Values of Difficulty," 204.

> met. Thus, I arrived at a second view of universality in which it is defined as a future-oriented labor of cultural translation.[34]

The designation "cultural translation" would seem to make a temporal distinction that denotes political promise: "cultural translation" is figured as future-looking and utopian; translation as interlingual transfer is thus assumed to be backward-looking, a mode that wittingly or unwittingly sanctions an unjust status quo (something we see Shankar questioning in the work of Bhabha, as well). How might we understand Butler's use of this concept as it applies a textual, linguistic maneuver to real-life transfers?

We soon discover that the distinction between cultural translation and interlingual transfer is dubious, for the real-life example she refers to in "Values of Difficulty" indicates that the two cannot be separated so easily:

> ... speaking locally, for the moment, this problem of translation, and its limits, takes place in gay politics as well, a lesson learned from AIDS activism in the 1980s, when activists sought to enter the Spanish-speaking communities, for instance, to do AIDS outreach by asking who was "homosexual" only to find that very few people would answer to the term. When they returned to ask who practiced anal sex with other men, many more people came forth, and a lesson was thereby learned by Anglo activists.[35]

The example leads us to ask: How do distinctions between language and culture, past and present, perform? This is exactly the kind of relevance academics have been calling for. But how do we use our critical skills to read such translations?

We can assume that the phrase "Spanish-speaking communities" refers to migrants within the USA who might not be as well-versed as the activists (or even as Butler's readers) in the rhetoric of American "gay politics" that she uses to frame the scene for us. Such a version of the story assumes that we know what these Spanish-speaking men who have anal sex with other men might not: that secrecy and shame only increase the odds of spreading infection, and that embracing the term 'homosexual' has a history of coming out in the USA that has become linked episte-

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[34] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1999): xvii–xviii.

[35] Butler, "Values of Difficulty," 204–205.

mologically with a powerful movement of AIDS awareness and research in America. We know that it is for the health of the bodies of these Spanish speakers that these activists, and therefore Butler, communicate concern. And yet, in the scene, these Spanish speakers are given as much voice as Jones's Hindus in his time: the word for 'homosexual' is glossed in the translation from English to Spanish, but we are not told if the history of the category is then interrogated in Spanish-to-English translations, or if the equation between homosexuality and AIDS is similarly complicated. The exchange between the two groups does not seem at all even – nor can it ever be. How do we compensate for such structural and situational incommensurability? It is not clear how Butler's approach to this scene of translation differs from that of Jones, the benevolent translator-cum-lawgiver, nor from the business-as-usual government officials in Manto's story. This contemporary, real-life example suggests that, in order to approach even a seemingly obvious scene of exchange with the appropriate values of difficulty, we need to formulate a more rigorous practice of reading acts of translation.

Elsewhere in Butler's writing on translation, she insists that "any effort to establish universality as transcendent of cultural norms seems to be impossible" and points us to the work of Homi Bhabha to help us understand how the Hegelian concept of "reciprocal recognition" can only prove good "under conditions of hybrid cultures and vacillating national boundaries, [...] a universality forged through the work of cultural translation."[36] This is a much more hopeful reading of Hegel than Niranjana's, who shows Hegel relying on evidence from Orientalist writings to describe Hindus as individuals incapable of action, which leads him to conclude that "it is the necessary fate of Asiatic Empires to be subjected to Europeans."[37] Bhabha likewise shows Frantz Fanon negatively ironizing, even mocking, the "Hegelian dream for a human reality *in-itself-for-itself*": conciliation is impossible, Fanon asserts, when one of the two terms of the dialectic is superfluous.[38] Bhabha, however, challenges such

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[36] Butler, "Restaging the Universal," *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality,* ed. Butler, Laclau & Žižek, 20.

[37] Niranjana, *Siting Translation,* 25–26, quoting Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* 207.

[38] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 61–62. Further page references are in the main text.

absolute pessimism with a plea for a renewed sense of the dream: “Can there be life without transcendence? Politics without the dream of perfectability?” (62). Instead, Bhabha makes an eloquent statement on behalf of “the edge, the in-between” from which “a strategy of subversion emerges” (62).

He develops this notion more fully in another essay in the same collection, “How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation.” In it, Bhabha announces that he has made an effort to work against the inherited limitations of universal humanism by appropriating Benjamin’s hopeful metaphor of “afterlife” in “The Task of the Translator,” combining it with Derrida’s notion of “*survivre*” in translation to celebrate the liminality of migrant experience as “the *element of resistance* in the process of transformation” (224). He asks a more agential version of his riddle of the in-between mentioned above: “Is there a poetics of the ‘interstitial’ community? How does it name itself, author its agency?” (231). This “it” (community as neutered, abstracted) that might name itself offers a partial answer to our earlier questions: Can a culture ever be understood to be speaking on its own behalf? How might such an entity be defined, circumscribed? And if one could speak for it, then who is authorized to speak thus? Authorized by whom, according to what protocol? For Bhabha, the task of the translator in our globalized world today is “to move the location of cultural difference away from the space of demographic *plurality* to the borderline negotiation of cultural translation” (223). He theorizes this negotiation by focussing on the bodies of migrants in London’s Indian–Pakistani ghetto, rendering them the literal to Derrida’s figurative “Living on: Borderlines” (223). While for Derrida and Benjamin such ontological questions are expressed in the play of language across borders, Bhabha insists that he is “less interested in the metonymic fragmentation of the ‘original’” and engaged instead “with the ‘foreign’ element that reveals itself in the interstitial” (227). If anyone is naming this interstitial community, it is a cultural translator and self-appointed spokesman such as Bhabha.

Bhabha begins by speaking of Saladin Chamcha, one of the main characters from *The Satanic Verses*, as “the discriminatory sign of a performative, projective British culture of race and racism” who “confounds nativist and supremacist ascriptions of national(ist) identities” (228). Alternatively, Bhabha turns to the nonfictional figure of Rushdie and the *fatwa* on his life to interrogate “the anxiety of the irresolvable, borderline

culture of hybridity that articulates [...] its diasporic aesthetic in an uncanny, disjunctive temporality" which Bhabha calls "the *space* of the untranslatable" (225). And while we might very well call the latter, real-life example as much of a "performative" as the character from Rushdie's fiction who serves as the metonym in Bhabha's interpretation for a generalized, anonymous migrant experience, we should note that, in the case of the *fatwa*, Bhabha is siting the authority of this cultural translation in the material phenomenon of Rushdie's historical ('real') body moving back and forth across national divides rather than the ways that Rushdie's prose plays with received cultural and linguistic categories. Here, then, it is Bhabha as much as Rushdie who is asserting a version of universality that is proleptic and performative, one capable of conjuring up a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility of a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met. How might we understand such a performative as a future-oriented labor of cultural translation?

A 'performative', J.L. Austin suggested in 1962, is a category of utterances which are not "in general a type of nonsense," but which, unlike a 'constative', "do not 'describe' or 'report' anything at all, are not 'true or false'; and [...] the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something."[39] He uses as his examples: uttering "I do" at a marriage ceremony; naming a ship; bequeathing property in a will; placing a bet. We might add to the list the issuing of a *fatwa* on the life of an author such as Salman Rushdie and translators of *The Satanic Verses*, and also the subsequent responses to this *fatwa*.[40] Or the various official and non-official campaigns initiated in response to the worldwide AIDS crisis, as we have seen in Butler's example. What these examples highlight is the ambiguous relationship between 'saying' and 'doing' that has subsequently spawned an entire sub-field known as Performance Studies, in which, as Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have pointed out, "highly detailed interrogations of the relation of *speech* to *act* are occurring in the space of

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[39] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962): 4, 5 (my emphasis).

[40] As it happens, two of the translators of *The Satanic Verses* were attacked: the Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, was stabbed and killed in 1991, while the Italian translator was beaten and stabbed, but survived his wounds.

a relatively recent interrogation of the relation of *act* to *identity*."[41] And if we were unsure before about the epistemological (as ontological) status of such "identity," they announce irresistibly: "Performativity [...] *lives* in the examples."[42] We might then be in a better position to see how Bhabha's concern with a Benjaminian "afterlife" might be worked out through the notion of the performative as a way of addressing who has a right to speak: a translation necessarily *lives* in the moment.

The question we thus need to address is how we might formulate a theory of interpretation that would apply to performatives between speech and act. Bhabha, for example, in writing on Rushdie's alleged act of "blasphemy" that provoked the *fatwa,* suggests that Rushdie's "sin" in writing *The Satanic Verses* was not necessarily that of misinterpretation, but that he relied on a medium – the novel – which, unlike poetry, "the traditional medium of censure" in the "Muslim world," opened up "a space of discursive contestation that places the authority of the Koran within a perspective of historical and cultural relativism" (226). Bhabha celebrates this "performative of translation" as an "iteration that is not belated, but ironic and insurgent" (227). The "poetics of the interstitial," he suggests, offers a lesson on the value of reading translation as a new genre, one that would make a place in the world for difference. This is one of many life-and-death examples that teach us much about the performance of untranslatability. What do we do when a powerful regime – the Ayatollah of Iran issuing a *fatwa* or the Prime Minister of England refuting the need for such – refuses to read a text the way we might wish? The promise the scholarship on performativity implicitly makes is that it will help us negotiate difference in fiction that might apply to real-life examples.

As it happens, Rushdie, his life on the line, writes a book of fiction while in hiding that offers a more playful way of "making linkages between the unstable elements of life and literature" (in Bhabha's ineluctable phrasing). *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* has its main character pose a devastating riddle at the start that propels the entire narrative: "What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" In this tale, Haroun has come home from school to find his world turned upside down: his mother has

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[41] Andrew Parker & Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction" to *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Parker & Sedgewick (New York & London: Routledge, 1995): 6.

[42] Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction," 5.

run away with another man, and all his father, a professional storyteller, can say is a feeble, nonsensical even absurd sound: AArk!" His profound disappointment has made him lose his storytelling gift, and therefore his source of livelihood.

In this *mise en abyme*, Rushdie is at his most eloquent in responding to this posture of dogmatism that threatens his own life when he plays with what Butler refers to as "the slide between fiction and life."[43] His protagonist Haroun ends up traveling to the imaginary planet of Kahani and dipping into the distressed Ocean of the Stream of Stories in an effort to help his father recover the "gift of gab." At first, this imaginary world seems entirely black and white, the planet engineered so that one hemisphere enjoys constant sunshine and the other complete darkness, but as he and his companions endeavor to travel to the source of stories they learn that to restore their lives to a happier equilibrium they must ensure that the planet cease to be so polarized. More than his life story, then, Rushdie's playful fiction offers a rich and promising image of such "borderlines negotiation."

As in Butler's anecdote on Adorno and Benjamin, Haroun's/Rushdie's loss is narrated to affirm, with an imaginary community of readers, what we value. Butler then ends her essay by asking if Benjamin might be

> telling us something about what truth has become for us, historically, that it has become a certain difficulty, and that if we are unwilling to be disarmed and to become, suddenly, unknowing, we assume instead a posture of dogmatism that may well sidetrack us from the evanescence, if not the ineffability, of a life?[44]

It is instructive to notice that this "truth" Benjamin is "telling us something about" is being told more by Butler in her reading of the events of Benjamin's life than by Benjamin's own words. Likewise, we could read the ending of the story of "Toba Tek Singh" as a pessimistic statement on the state of translation, or use our own position of scholars of translation to see in it possibilities for stepping beyond the "threshold" Shankar has identified, one that has stymied a fictional character like Bishan Singh:

[43] Butler, "Values of Difficulty," 214.
[44] Butler, "Values of Difficulty," 214.

> Just before sunrise, Bishan Singh, the man who had stood on his legs for fifteen years, screamed and as officials from the two sides rushed towards him, he collapsed on the ground. There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.[45]

Rather than be dismayed by a lack of empirical evidence for such real-life examples, rather than search out an origin in the physical world that might secure this particular version of events, my suggestion is that we learn to read these interpretations as attentively and skillfully as any imaginative text deserves. These are the borderlines between cultural translation and interlingual transfer that we have already learned to negotiate.

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Meeting Online

Translation and Transmission on the Web

ARNAB CHAKLADAR

The state of things

IN 1997, SALMAN RUSHDIE informed the English-reading world of his opinion that the Indian prose literature produced in English since Independence in 1947 constitutes both "a stronger and more important body of work" than most of that produced in the same time-frame in all the other Indian languages, as well as the "true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century."[1] I have argued elsewhere that this formulation has its own shadow history in the academic study of Indian literature in the West, and that it would seem to be supported by the interests and obsessions of the Anglo-American academy as brought to bear on the study and teaching of Indian literature.[2] Here I would like to begin by drawing attention to the matter of Rushdie's supporting evidence. I reiterate Rushdie's inauguration of what has now become an over-rehearsed debate about the relative merits of Indian literature in English and those in what he refers to as the "vernacular literatures" not in order to submit yet another vote for those unfortunate vernaculars, but because Rushdie's premisses and methodology (so far as the latter is visible)

[1] Salman Rushdie, "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You!" *New Yorker* (23 June 1997): 50.

[2] Chakladar, "The Postcolonial Bazaar: Marketing/Teaching Indian Literature," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 31 (2000): 183–201.

highlight quite well the major problems that marks the terrain of Indian literatures: the state of communication between literary traditions, and the status/reception of translation and translated texts.

Leaving aside the question of the value or ethical horizon of any such pronouncement as Rushdie's, the question it begs is how we could begin to assess this statement. The constitution of India now recognizes twenty-four official languages alone; while not all have significant bodies of literature in them, this nonetheless denotes a vast literary field – especially when we include literatures in other state languages and in languages spoken by relatively smaller groups of speakers. Indeed, the Sahitya Akademi awards are given for writing in twenty-four languages. If such a heterogeneity renders somewhat complicated the idea of an 'Indian' literature, not to mention – more than a little quixotic – the idea of a 'professor of Indian Literature', it would seem to make positively Sisyphean the task of becoming and remaining conversant in literary production across these languages. Needless to say, there are no scholars fluent in all these languages, let alone capable of assessing literatures composed in them. In Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August, An Indian Story* (a novel itself much concerned with relationships between languages), Sathe, the "joker of Madna," observes, of the protagonist, Agastya Sen: "'I presume you know at least three languages, English, Hindi and Bengali, yet you find it so difficult to communicate here. And three languages, you could be master of Europe'."[3] The problem is exacerbated for the reader, since verbal fluency is not, of course, the same thing as literary fluency. Unless one has the resources to marshal a team of literary scholars across all the languages, one is reliant on translations to stay abreast of developments in all the literatures of the Indian subcontinent. And it is indeed through translations into English that Rushdie comes to his conclusion. He notes the possibility that "good writers have been ill served by their translators' inadequacies" but nonetheless feels comfortable making his appraisal, since between the efforts of the Sahitya Akademi, UNESCO, and Indian publishers "the problem [of bad translation], while not eradicated, is certainly much diminished."[4]

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[3] Upamanyu Chatterjee, *English, August, An Indian Story* (New Delhi: Rupa, 1994): 48.

[4] Rushdie, "Damme," 52.

However, it is not very clear what method of selection Rushdie has followed in choosing translations to read. For purposes of first-hand evaluation of his claim, he provides his readers with a short list of “present-day successors” to the pre-Independence “vernacular-language writers who would merit a place in any anthology,” and presumably this is the list he himself has used.[5] But the list is strange indeed. For example, it includes Nirala, who not only died in 1961 but whose significant reputation is as a poet; it also includes Ismat Chughtai and Amrita Pritam (also remembered largely for her poetry), both of whom continued to write after Independence but are closer to the generation of some of the writers Rushdie lists for the pre-Independence period. More significant perhaps is the matter of who is not included. As great as the reputations of O.V. Vijayan, Nirmal Verma, U.R. Ananthamurthy, Suresh Joshi, and Qurratalain Hyder (the five other names in Rushdie’s list of contemporary vernacular-language writers) are in their own languages, none of them belongs to the generation of writers born immediately before or after Independence – in other words, to the generation of Indian-English writers Rushdie is comparing them to. This is not to suggest that Rushdie’s estimation would change if he only had truly contemporary writers on his list,[6] but to delineate the fact that his list betrays a lack of knowledge of the particulars of actual contemporary literary production in languages other than English – for example, his list includes none of the recent winners of the Sahitya Akademi awards in the languages he mentions. And in this again, Rushdie is surely not alone: leave alone lay readers of Indian-English fiction, the vast majority of professors of Indian literature in English departments in the West are probably in the same boat. The truth of the matter is that even without Rushdie’s casting of the relationship between Indian literatures in English and other languages in competitive terms, very few avenues of communication exist between the language literatures of India, and the gulf between the Indian-English reader and the other literatures is particularly deep and wide.

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[5] Rushdie, “Damme,” 52.

[6] And, for what it is worth, existing translations of the work of O.V. Vijayan, U.R Ananthamurthy and especially Nirmal Verma should alone provide enough counter-evidence to Rushdie’s claim. I am unable to speak to the translations of Joshi’s and Hyder’s work.

This is a gulf that translation is supposed to bridge. Even if we take at its word the Sahitya Akademi's problematic formulation that "Indian literature is one but written in many languages," a constant movement between literatures in different languages would be needed to constantly reiterate and confirm this unity. The Akademi notes:

> In spite of the pan-Indian character of our literature, writers and readers in one language know very little of what is being written in the neighbouring linguistic area. It is, therefore, necessary to devise methods by which Indian writers may come to know each other, cross the barriers of language and script, and appreciate the immense variety and complexity of their country's literary heritage.[7]

The programs devised by the Akademi to achieve this are truly inspiring in scope, and, significantly, include a large number of workshops on translation.[8] The proceedings of the workshops on literary translation organized by the Akademi from 1986 to 1988 make clear that the Akademi has taken great pains to facilitate discussions of translation theory among active translators;[9] and the schedule of programs organized in the following years speaks to the commitment to addressing the specific challenges of translating between a large number of Indian languages, and not just into English.[10] However, while state sponsorship makes possible the scope of the Sahitya Akademi's activities, awareness of these remains restricted to a fairly narrow academic audience within India. Very few of these translations are readily available on the mass market and very little critical discourse on them circulates in either academic journals or in the popular press. And, in any case, it goes without saying that even this salu-

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[7] From the Sahitya Akademi website: http://www.sahitya-akademi.org/sahitya-akademi/lit01.htm

[8] In addition to the better-known literary awards in each of the twenty-four languages it recognizes, the Akademi also gives annual awards for the best translations into each of those languages. For a list of winners from 1989 to 2005, see http://www.sahitya-akademi.org/sahitya-akademi/awa501.htm.

[9] See Ayappa Paniker, ed. *Making of Indian Literature: A Consolidated Report of Workshops on Literary Translation 1986–88* (Calcutta: Sahitya Akademi, 1991).

[10] For a list of the Akademi's translation workshops since 1988, see http://www.sahitya-akademi.org/sahitya-akademi/lit08.htm

tary translation program represents a mere fraction of the literature produced each year in the relevant languages.[11]

To some extent, this has been supplemented by translations published by major popular presses. In the early 1990s, Penguin India embarked on a program of translations from other Indian languages into English. A considerable amount of remarkable fiction was translated quite competently in this series (though Rushdie shows little sign of having encountered any of it); however, later in the decade Penguin seemed to back away from this program of translation, picking it up again only after 2000. This period also saw the waxing and waning of Macmillan India's ambitious Modern Indian Novels in Translation series, which despite its scope did not really succeed in reaching a wide readership in English. Perhaps the most sustained and successful projects of translation of late are those of Katha and Seagull, the former publishing translations from a wide range of languages and periods, the latter almost exclusively from Bengali. All of these series, of course, unlike the Sahitya Akademi, feature one-way translation – from other Indian languages into English. (I must acknowledge here my own ignorance of the current state of popular press translations in/between other Indian languages.) The one major departure here is Penguin India's recent announcement of its entry into the world of non-English publishing; an entry marked first by translations, both of English titles into other Indian languages, and of translations of Hindi fiction into other Indian languages.[12]

All in all, it would appear that the state of translation – at least into English – is far less grim in India than it is in the USA.[13] (And it is important for academics not to lose sight of this – the discourse around trans-

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[11] The quality of translations produced by the Akademi has been a subject of debate that I leave to others to consider.

[12] The final impetus of this venture will, however, likely be original publishing in other Indian languages. If successful this should provide a major fillip to the publishing industry in the targeted languages. This should in no way be downplayed even if it means an eventual move away from translation.

[13] Lawrence Venuti reports that translations into English in the USA and UK remain at levels lower than three percent of total publication, despite a rise in the total number of books published. This is in contrast to the ratios in European publishing industries. See Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 1995): 12. While I do not have numbers at hand for Indian translations into English, a glance at the catalogs of Indian publishers would seem to suggest that the ratio is significantly higher in India as well.

lation and Indian literature should not take as its primary premise the state of awareness of Indian literature in the West, as sometimes seems to be the case.) For claims such as Rushdie's, then, it would be tempting to posit that it is merely the case that a) more quality translations already existed in 1997 than Rushdie was aware of and b) that this still represented (and represents today) a fairly random sampling of the scenes of contemporary Indian literatures, scenes which Rushdie evidently has little exposure to or knowledge of. The bigger problem, of course, is that even if adjudicating between two language literatures is possible, let alone desirable, this would need to happen on the terrain of bilingual readership, not translation. In other words, the fundamental problem with Rushdie's claim is its reliance on an idea that a translation can, effectively or poorly, replace the original. This is not to suggest that there is no problem with the state of translation in the Indian publishing industry, but to shift the terms of discussion of translation from those implicit in Rushdie's thesis.

No matter what the quality of the translation, the translated text is separate from the source text and can only convey the milieu of the source language and text through allusion and echo: reading a Hindi novel in English translation is not the same as reading a Hindi novel in Hindi. A translation does not replace the source text, nor can it tell us very much about the source text or its literary-linguistic context other than at the relatively banal level of thematic content (to the extent that this can be separated from form or language): its literary effects are its own, and its zone of operation is translation itself. That is to say, what a translation primarily tells us about is the process of translation itself, and about the relationships between languages and literatures. A translation as such is not simply the original text in a new language, it includes a larger set of textual materials: a translation is always in excess of what is translated. I refer here not to the question of whether a translation is equivalent to the source text in the meanings and aesthetic effects it generates, or, for that matter, to that of whether a translator adds or subtracts sentence-level content from the source text, but to those secondary materials that record, among other things, the rhetorical gaps between the source and target languages as well as the translator's negotiation of them. Unfortunately, the mainstream publishing industry works assiduously to erase this excess, to create the impression that a translation is not a translation. Thus, only very rarely do translations carry the visible marks of translation: while translators are named, they are rarely accorded space to explicate their approach

to translation in general, and to the specific text in particular;[14] footnotes are frowned upon; and the emphasis is on 'smooth' translation, filling in the gaps between and within languages that translation opens up.[15] All of this, of course, smacks of academicism and is, as such, anathema to a popular industry which operates in a market system that values the ideology of aesthetic autonomy. For a translated text to highlight its translatedness in such a context would be tantamount to marking it as inauthentic, as a copy in a world that values only originals. Furthermore, even where translations are published with the full range of framing materials referred to above, they arrive with the solidity of a single, unified text. Translation as process is replaced by translation as finished object.

We are left, then, with a situation in which the economics of print publishing cannot help but limit the economies of translation, and in which the stratifications of readerships by language are rendered more concrete each day by an industry predicated on monolinguality. I would propose, however, that a medium exists whose structure makes it not only more suitable than print publishing as a home for translation and inter-language/literature communication, but in many ways ideal for these crucial tasks: the Web.

[14] See, for example, the recent translation of Premchand's novel *Sevasadan*, from Oxford University Press in India. The text is introduced comprehensively by Vasudha Dalmia, who does a sterling job of setting the historical and literary context of the novel, and describing its old and new readerships. However, the translator Snehal Shingavi is missing: we do not get so much as a translator's foreword, let alone any insight into the particular problems of translating Premchand's language; nor do we get any sense of the translator's approach to rendering the presence of other languages in the source text into English, or his occasional use of what seem to be linguistic anachronisms in the translation. By and large, this sort of an approach is standard-issue in the world of Indian translations. There are exceptions, of course; among them, Prasenjit Gupta's wonderful translations of stories by Nirmal Verma as *Indian Errant* (New Delhi: Indialog, 2002), and Gayatri Spivak's translations of Mahasweta Devi's work – for example, in *Imaginary Maps* (New York: Routledge, 1994) and, more recently, *Chhoti Munda and his Arrow* (Calcutta: Seagull, 2002).

[15] I am referring here to what Gayatri Spivak has described as the "jagged relationship between rhetoric and logic" and the task of the translator in communicating this relationship that exists between the source language text and the target language text. See Spivak,"The Politics of Translation," in Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 179–201.

Re-situating the conversation

It is the formal qualities of the Web as medium, rather than as just another avenue of publishing, that make it a perfect venue for a project of translation. For example, the experience of reading online, which already incorporates lateral movement within and outside a text via hyperlinks, anticipates the objections that readers and editors of paper texts have to footnotes and prefatory materials. But let us consider some of the more substantive opportunities the Web gives to writers and readers of translations, and the ways in which it allows them to sidestep the obstacles that print publishing places in their way.

Translation as process: As all translators will testify, translation is a constant process of negotiation between non-equivalent structures of feeling of source and target languages. Where the original text presents a sentence in the source language, a translation opens up the possibility of multiple new sentences in the target language. It is through a long series of such choices that the translator presents us with a new text that presents itself again as a sequence of singular sentences. If a publisher allows, the occasional footnote enables the translator to hint at other possible renditions that open up other emphases or speak to the incommensurate nature of translation. The Web, however, not constrained in any way by the economics of print publishing, can allow far more: it gives the translator the freedom to present a multitude of textual choices – accessible through hyperlinks and popups, rather than footnotes; easily implemented scripts can give a reader the option to re-load a text with a different combination of translation choices. The weave of the text of translation can thus be opened up by the reader in a way that it cannot in print. A translation, it is said, is never finished, only abandoned; on the Web, it never need be abandoned.[16]

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[16] See, for example, Frances Pritchett's expanded version of her print translation of Abdullah Husain Bilgrami's *The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dastan of Amir Hamzah* on her website: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00litlinks/hamzah. Pritchett notes that space constraints in the print version required cutting the original translation in half, and omitting significant prefatory materials. The Web not only makes it possible for her to place the entire text online, it also enables more frequent modifications and corrections to the original materials (which would not otherwise be possible in print without a new edition).

Multiplying translation: If the economic constraints of print make it all but impossible for a translator to revisit translation choices through continuing revision, they make it equally difficult to get approval for proposals of simultaneous translations of texts that have already been translated. On the Web, however, there is, once again, no such constraint. Translators can place differing translations of the same source text alongside each other, making it possible for readers to compare and weigh different choices and approaches to translation. The individual translator is also able to provide ongoing commentary.

Talking about translation: What Web technologies, such as forums and wikis, further allow is ongoing conversation not only among translators but also among readers of translation. The development of dynamic fonts (supported by most modern browsers) enables a Web publisher to simultaneously present both the source text in its original script and the translation(s). This, in and of itself, is a huge improvement over the mechanics of print publishing, where bilingual editions that present both the source-language text and the target-language translation are very difficult to come by. On the Web, this allows us to go further: a forum link allows readers to then present their own translation of selections from texts and engage more fully in the conversation about translation. Translators, too, are able both to discuss their choices, and, if so moved, to revise them. Translation then becomes not only a community text but also a community practice.

The task of facilitating communication between language traditions, of course, does not need to be directly linked to a project of translation, but is itself also uniquely enabled by the Web. I noted in the previous section the problem of the poor state of communication between the various Indian literary traditions, especially where lay readers are concerned. A large part of the problem, of course, stems from the Indian education system, which does not encourage multilingualism in a hard sense – as a result of which, few readers grow up with a facility in more than one or, at most, two literary traditions. Even for truly bilingual readers (as opposed to speakers), the worlds of their literatures remain largely separate – enclosed in different circles of reading, available in different bookstores and libraries, and rarely in critical conversation with one another. In the case of English-only readers, the larger system of value and cultural capital that circulates around Indian-English literature has led to a greater insulation from and indifference to literatures in other Indian languages. To some extent, we might even postulate that translation by itself fuels this problem, in that it

may perhaps encourage a syndrome by which anything that is not translated into English is taken to not exist, or not be worth knowing. I do not mean to downplay these larger structural difficulties or to suggest that they may be simply overcome. I will suggest, however, that the Web is again already showing us another way.

While the Web remains predominantly an English-dominated space, the presence of other languages and their scripts is steadily growing. A large part of this can be ascribed to the development of the previously mentioned dynamic fonts, and to the growing adoption of the Unicode protocol. Early sites that wished to display text in non-Roman Indian scripts had to resort to conversion of text into image files. Now almost every Indian script can be viewed online on pages encoded in Unicode or via the automatic download of a dynamic font file that loads with the page and displays the script. This allows for the easy transmission online of languages other than English; of course, this does not by itself do anything to facilitate communication between readers of different language literatures – though it is important as well not to downplay the sheer fact of the availability of their second- and third-language scripts to English-medium educated readers who now live in places where they might not otherwise encounter them (not to mention the availability of first-language scripts to readers in places where texts in languages other than English are hard to come by in the print world). More importantly, in terms of this discussion, what the new font protocols enable is the existence of bilingual literary websites. One such site is the Bengali literary webzine Parabaas.[17]

Launched in 1997, Parabaas sought partly to address, in the words of one of its founders, "the internet not allowing a level-playing field to other (non-English, specifically Bangla) cultures/communities."[18] The site developed its own free, downloadable Bengali word-processing software, later moving to dynamic fonts; indeed, Parabaas is at the forefront of the effort to standardize a Bengali font map. The site's focus has always been on Bengali literature, but this has grown to include translations into Bengali (of both creative work and interviews with writers in other languages) as well as translations of Bengali literature into English. For the English-

[17] http://www.parabaas.com

[18] Parabaas' history is taken from a personal interview with Samir Bhattacharya, one of the site's founders.

language reader, Parabaas Translation (the translation wing of the site) is an invaluable window into modern and contemporary Bengali literature; the fact that it sits as a subset of a comprehensive literary site in Bengali discourages any thought of translation's serving as an adequate substitute for an entire literature. Parabaas does not as yet feature discussion forums for its readership, so the prospect of conversation between its English-language and its Bengali-language readers has not yet been realized. Multilingual communication on Web forums is itself, however, already here, and I will close here with a brief discussion of *anothersubcon tinent.com*, an online journal and forum for South Asian art and culture, which I founded in August 2004.

The journal component of Another Subcontinent features work by South Asian writers and visual artists, well-known and lesser-known. A major part of our mission with literature has been to bring to a larger audience writers and texts that are not always well-known outside their home languages and countries. So far this has taken the form of presenting interviews with major writers, and translations from other languages into English.[19] Our readership is truly global, with the majority of hits coming from all over South Asia, North America, Europe, and Australia. Translations featured so far on the site include that of a medieval Tamil devotional poem, Hindi short stories by Chandradhar Sharma Guleri and Premchand, and an Urdu short story by Ikramullah.[20] (While Premchand is, of course, far from a lesser-known writer, the translations we feature are of stories which present a somewhat different Premchand than the canonical figure familiar to anglophone readers.) In its first two years, the site has been geared towards an anglophone readership – with both original writing and translation in English. In the upcoming years we will be shifting gears to present both original work in and translations into other Indian languages. Our goal, finally, is to end up with a multilingual website.[21] Indeed, multilingualism is already the order of the day on our forums.

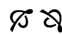
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[19] In-depth interviews with Kiran Nagarkar and Githa Hariharan, both of whom write in English, are already on the site; an interview with the prominent Hindi writer Uday Prakash was the lead feature in January 2007.

[20] See http://www.anothersubcontinent.com/writing.html for details.

[21] I will take this opportunity to invite writers and translators in all South Asian languages to submit their work at http://www.anothersubcontinent.com/submit.html

There are two kinds of interactions to stress here: first, every feature published on the journal part of the site is linked to a discussion topic of its own in our literature forums. Here the writer or translator is able to interact directly with our readers and discuss their creative process and choices. In the case of translations, opportunities thus exist to discuss literary traditions in the source languages, the particular text that has been translated, and the translator's particular approach to translation.[22] The bulk of the interaction on the forums, however, is independent of the features, and it is here that the possibilities of the Web in bringing together readers of different language literatures is demonstrated on a larger scale. The forum pages are encoded in the UTF-8 character-set – a Unicode encoding – which allows for members to post directly into the forums in a wide variety of Indic scripts. Thus, not only do we have discussions in English about South Asian literatures in various languages, we also have bilingual discussions. Indeed, some of our most active discussions have been of Marathi literature, the bulk of it revolving around writers and texts not available in English translation. Interestingly, a small part of our membership has expressed reservations about this kind of multilingual interaction as being exclusionary of those who cannot read particular scripts/languages. On the whole, however, the membership finds, both inside and outside literary forums, that this mode of linguistic interaction (and not just in the literature forums) to be stimulating and more than a little edifying. While the site itself is only a little over two years old at this point, and while the majority of our current membership is English-medium educated and anglophone in their literary affiliations, we are very enthusiastic about the growing literary and linguistic diversity on the forums.



I do not mean to suggest that sites such as Another Subcontinent or Parabaas, among others, are the future of Indian literature, or more generally that the Web is the panacea for all that ails the current state of translation

[22] The discussion of Moazzam Sheikh's translation of Ikramullah's Urdu short story "Le Gayi Pavan Ura" is a particularly good example of all this at work. For the translation and the link to the discussion, see http://www.anothersubcontinent.com/ikramullah.html.

and linguistic/literary communication in South Asia. What I have described above, especially with regard to translation, has a strong utopian element to it. For instance, the question of translation rights or compensation for translators is not addressed. In other words, I am not proposing a workable economic model here for a new translation industry. These are, of course, real constraints that cannot be wished away. However, the discursive possibilities opened up by a move to the Web need to be explored. What I envision here is a kind of meta-site that does not yet exist. One could think of it as a network of overlapping sites on Indian literature and translation, each focussing on particular source and/or target languages, bringing together both readers of translation and readers of different language traditions. And such a project could indeed be economically viable. At the very least, websites for print translations could extend the conversation about and the life of a translation past the static print text. I will suggest that academics and others invested in these questions need to begin to take the Web more seriously as a site for these conversations. Not simply because the Web enables them in a way that print cannot, but because it is where these conversations are already flourishing.

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Notes on the Contributors

URVASHI BUTALIA is a well-known publisher, author, historian, and civil rights activist. She and Ritu Menon co-founded Kali for Women Press, India's first feminist publishing house. In 2003 Urvashi Butalia launched an imprint, Zubaan, which continues to publish books by, for, on or about women – and women's issues – in South Asia for an international market and remains committed to keeping the price of books affordable. Zubaan's list has many women-authored works in Hindi and also works with other Indian publishers to translate the Zubaan list into other Indian languages. Information about Zubaan can be found at *http://www.zubaan books.com*. Among Butalia's notable publications are *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (2000) and *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir* (2002).

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CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI is an award-winning author who has written extensively about the Indian immigrant experience in the USA. Among her works are *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), and *Vine of Desire* (2002). She has also written several collections of short stories and children's books. Her most recent novel is *Palace of Illusions* (2008).

MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR is an influential Marathi playwright, critic, and author. He has written over fifteen plays, including *Raktapushpa* (*Petals of Blood*, 1972; repr. 1989), *Party* (1976; repr. 1989), *Pratibimb* (*Reflection*, 1972; repr. 1989), and the *Wada Trilogy* (1985–1994; repr. 2004). His plays have been translated and performed in English, French, and German. He has also contributed to the Middle Cinema Movement in India, written screenplays, and acted in films. He has won numerous awards, including the Homi Bhabha Fellowship (1976–78), the Sangeet Natak Akademi annual award for best playwright (1989), and the Sahitya Akademi Award (2002). In October 2005, he was Brittingham Visiting Scholar in the Department of Theater and Drama at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and participated in the pre-conference Roundtable on the language debates from which this volume of essays emerged.

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MINI KRISHNAN has worked in the publishing industry in India for over twenty years. Currently, she is an editor with Oxford University Press and oversees their translation program. Previously, she worked at Macmillan and was their series editor for Modern Indian Novels in Translations. Several of the translated works that she has edited have been winners of the Hutch Crossword Prize. Several translations she did won Sahitya Akademi prizes for translation. Three of her projects, Bama's *Karukku* (2000), Chandra Sekhar Rath's *Astride the Wheel* (2003), and, most recently, C.S. Lakshmi's *In the Forest, A Deer* (2006), have won the Hutch Crossword Prize for Translation. She is also the founder–editor of the South Asia Women's Writing Website hosted by the British Council

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NINA SWAMIDOSS MCCONIGLEY holds an MFA in Fiction from the University of Houston, where she was an Inprint Brown Foundation Fellow. Chitra Divakaruni served as thesis advisor for her story collection about Indo-Americans in Wyoming. Nina currently lives in Casper, Wyoming and is at work on her first novel.

CHRISTI ANN MERRILL teaches South Asian Literature and Postcolonial Theory at the University of Michigan. She has translated poetry and prose from Hindi, Rajasthani, and French. Her articles on translation theory have appeared in such journals as the *Bucknell Review*, *Genre*, *Twentieth Century Literature*, the *Iowa Review*, *Poetry Review*, and *Words without Borders*. In 2002, she received a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship to translate Vijaydan Detha's *A Double Life and Other Stories*. Her book *Riddles of Belonging: India in Translation and Other Tales of Possession* will appear in 2008, as will her translations of Rajasthani writer Vijay Dan Detha's stories, *A Straw Epic and Other Stories*.

JOSNA REGE is an associate professor of Languages and Literature at Worcester State College in Massachusetts, specializing in postcolonial, world, and US ethnic literatures. Her book *Colonial Karma: Self, Action, and Nation in the Indian English Novel* (2004) explores the novel's shifting role in both constructing and challenging the discourse of nationalism at different moments in India's colonial and postcolonial history. Her current research examines emergent forms and strategies of South Asian women's cultural production, "in and across nations."

PRADIP SEN is a poet and one of the founding members of the Calcutta Writers Workshop. Sen's first collection of verse, *And then the Sun* (Writers Workshop), was published in 1960; his latest publications include *Rammohan and the Brahmos* (1994) and *Collected Poems 1948–96* (1996). He now lives in Bangalore, India.

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S. SHANKAR is author, editor or translator of five books. His second novel, *No End to the Journey*, was published in 2005. His volume of criticism, *Textual Traffic: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Economy of the Text*, appeared in 2001, the same year as his translation into English of Komal Swaminathan's Tamil play *Thaneer, Thaneer*. He is co-editor of the anthology *Crossing into America: The New Literature of Immigration* (2003; paperback, 2005). His essay "Midnight's Orphans, or, A Postcolonialism Worth Its Name" (*Cultural Critique* 56, Winter 2004) has been widely cited. He teaches in the English Department at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, where he is also Director of the Center for South Asian Studies.

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BONNIE ZARE, co-editor of this volume, is Associate Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Wyoming. She teaches courses on Victorian, contemporary American, and South Asian gender issues and literature. Her work has appeared in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, the *South Asian Review*, *Transformations*, and the *College Language Association Journal*, among others. Zare has won the University of Wyoming's highest teaching award and, as faculty advisor for the Women's Action Network, helps organize campus events promoting social justice.